

MIDDLE MANAGERS SHAPING STRATEGIC OUTCOMES WITHIN A PRIVATE
HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION: A CASE STUDY

by

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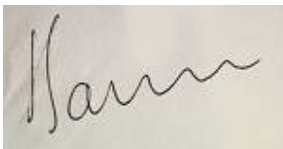
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I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used and quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



15 June 2018

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how middle managers use their micro-strategising practices of agency and sense-making to shape strategic outcomes during and after strategic change implementation within an enabling and/or constraining organisational social structure. The researcher examined this phenomenon through the theoretical lenses of strategy-as-practice perspective and sense-making. The qualitative case-study research design with an interpretivist, social constructionist paradigm captured the lived organisational social reality of the administrative middle managers over time at a for-profit educational brand of a private higher education (PHE) provider. A thematic data analysis approach integrated manual coding with electronic coding to analyse data gathered through an emergent research design of text messages and e-mail journals over a four-month period. Data-driven inductive coding was synthesised with structural deductive coding in response to the research questions. The dissertation concludes that administrative middle managers use micro-level strategising practices of retrospective and prospective cognitive and emotional sense-making and the practical coping of agency, or embodied sense-making, to navigate a complex and contradictory organisational socio-cultural context that is both enabling and constraining. A further contribution of the current study speaks to the embedded practices between the two discrete levels of organisation and individual, which has been interpreted through the contradictions following the equivocal signals that these two main levels demonstrate. The porous inter-dependency between the two levels of organisation and individual creates an inter-woven entity where the strands of individual and organisational action are difficult to pull out and name distinctly, without unravelling the tapestry that is the organisational entity. These contributions affirm the intellectual puzzle which sought to understand and/or restore the balance of the individual within an organisational socio-cultural context to attain organisational security and equilibrium after organisational change. The findings of this current study is not generalisable to the other seven educational brands of the PHE provider.

Key terms: strategy-as-practice; sense-making (embodied, retrospective and prospective); middle managers; agency; organisational social structure (enabling, constraining)

BAOKAMEDI BA MAHARENG BA BOPANG DIPHETHO TSA MERALO KAHARE
HO SETSI SA PORAEFETE SA THUTO E PHAHAMENG: PHUPUTSO

ka

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KAKARETSO

Boithuto bona bo shebana le tsela eo ka yona baokamedi ba mahareng ba sebedisang ditlwaelo tsa ketso ya meralo e menyane (*micro-strategising*) ya diejensi le ketso ya moelelo ho bopa diphetho tsa meralo nakong ya le kamora ho kenngwa tshebetsong ha phetolo ya moralo kahare ho sebopeho se dumellang le/kapa se thibelang sa setjhaba. Mofuputsi o hlahlobile mohopolo ona ka leihlo la thiori ya moralo-jwaloka-ketso le ketso ya moelelo. Sebopeho sa dipatlisiso tsa phuputso ya boleng se nang le saense ya setjhaba le paterone ya kgaho ya setjhaba se hapile mokgatlo wa setjhaba wa sebele o phetsweng wa baokamedi ba mahareng ba tsamaiso nako e telele letshwaong la thuto la phaello ho mofani wa thuto e hodimo ya poraefete (PHE). Katamelo ya manollo ya pokello e amanang le thuto e ikgethang e kopantse tokiso ya tokomane ka letsoho le ka elektoniki ho manolla pokello e bokelletsweng ka sebopeho sa dipatlisiso se qalang sa melaetsa ya mongolo le di-emaili nakong ya dikgwedi tse nne. Mongolo wa qaleho o tsamaiswang ke pokello o ile wa hlahiswa ka elektoniki le mongolo o latelang dikarolo tse itseng tsa molao o akaretsang ho araba dipotso tsa dipatlisiso. Thuto e phethela ka hore baokamedi ba bohareng ba tsamaiso ba sebedisa ditlwaelo tsa mekgwa e boemong bo tlase ba ketsahalo ya moelelo boiphihlelong ka ho kgutlela morao le ho nahanela pele ka kellelo le maikutlo le ho sebetsa ho kgonehang ha mokgatlo, kapa ho fana ka moelelo boiphihlelong ho kopantsweng ho batlisisang maemo a rarahaneng le a hananang a moetlo wa mokgatlo a nolofatsang le a thibelang ka bobedi. Monehelo o eketsehileng wa thuto ya morao-rao o bua ka ditlwaelo tse keneletseng dipakeng tsa maemo a mabedi a fapaneng a mokgatlo le a motho ka mong a tolokuweng ka ho hanyetsana ho latela matshwao a ka tolokehang ka ditsela tse fapaneng tseo maemo ana a mabedi a ka sehloohong a di bontshang. Ho emelana hona ho kenellanang ho dipakeng tsa maemo a mabedi a mokgatlo le motho ka bo mong ho theha mokgatlo wa kgokahano oo ho ona dikgwele tsa motho ka bo mong le kgato ya mokgatlo di bang thata ho hulwa le ho reha ka tsela e hlakileng kantle le ho senya lesela leo e leng mokgatlo. Menehelo

ena e netefatsa selotho se neng se batla ho utlwisisa le/kapa ho tsosolosa tekanyo ya motho kahare ho maemo a setso sa setjhaba sa mokgatlo ho fumana tshireletso ya mokgatlo le boikgutso kamora ho fetoha ha mokgatlo. Diphumano tsa thuto ena ya morao-rao ha di akareletswe ho matshwao a mang a thuto a supileng a mofani wa PHE

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KAFUSHANE NGOCWANINGO

Lolu cwaningo lucubungula udaba lokuthi izimenenja ezisezikhundleni ezimaphakathi zizisebenzisa kanjani izinkambiso zazo zokwenza amaqhinga namasu emazingeni aphantsi okusebenzisa ikhono lazo lokuzikhethela nokuthatha izinyathelo ngokuzimela (agency) nokwenza kuzwakale futhi kuqondakale lokho ezikwenzayo nezikushoyo (sense-making) ngenhloso yokubumba imiphumela enobuqhinga ngaphambi kokuba kuqaliswe uguquko olunobuqhinga futhi nangenkathi sekuqaliswa uguquko olunjalo olwenzeka ngaphakathi ohlakeni lwesakhiwo senhlalo esivumelayo kanye/noma esivimbelayo. Umcwaningi wakuhlaziya futhi wakuhlolisisa lokhu esebenzisa indlela yokubheka izinto ngokwethiyori yokusebenzisa iqhingasuka njengenkambiso (strategy-as-practice perspective) kanye nokwenza kuzwakale futhi kuqondakale lokho okwenziwayo nokushiwoyo. Idizayini yocwaningo lwesigameko olukhwalithethivu olugxile ekutheni izimenenja zibheke izinto njengoba zinjalo ngokwesokuzigameko ezidlule kuzona izimenenja, ngokuqhubeka kwesikhathi, ekuxhumaneni nasekusebenzeni kwazo nabanye abantu esikhungweni semfundo ephakeme esithile esizimele esiqhuba umsebenzi wokuqeqesha ngenhloso yokungenisa imali nokwenza inzuzo, phecelezi umhlinzeki we-private higher education (PHE). Ucwaningo lwasebenzisa indlela yokuhlaziya idatha ngokucubungula nokuqopha amaphethini, okuyindlela eyadidiyela ukuhlelwa nokuhlungwa kwedatha ngesandla nangobuchwepheshe bekhompyutha ngenhloso yokuhlaziya idatha eqoqwe kusetshenziswa i-emergent research design yemiqhafazo (text messages) kanye namajenali ama-imeyili esikhathini esiyizinyanga ezine. Ukuze kuhlinzekwe ngezimpendulo emibuzweni yocwaningo kwahlanganiswa indlela yokuhlela nokuhlunga idatha esuselwa kuhlobo lwedatha eqoqiwe (inductive) kanye nendlela yokuhlunga ngokusebenzisa uhlelo olwenziwe ngaphambi kokuqoqwa kwedatha (deductive). Ucwaningo luphetha ngokukhipha umbono wokuthi izimenenja ezisezikhundleni ezimaphakathi zisebenzisa izinkambiso zazo zokuqhamuka namaqhinga namasu emazingeni aphantsi okwenza izinto ziqondakale ngokusebenzisa ingqondo nemizwa mayelana nezigameko ezenzeke esikhathini

esedlule, nalezo ezingahle zenzeke esikhathini esizayo kanye nokubonela kwikhono lomunye umuntu, njengoba linjalo, lokuthatha izinyathelo nokwenza izinto ngokuzimela noma ukwenza izinto ziqondakale, okuyingxenye yalokho, ngenhloso yokuchusha nokuthubeleza esimweni senhlalo-masiko esiyinkimbinkimbi futhi esiziphikisayo, esikwenza kokubili ukuvumela kanye nokuvimbela. Elinye futhi igalelo lalolu cwaningo lwamanje liphathelene nezinkambiso ezifakwe zagxila emazingeni amabili ahlukene ngokucacile phakathi kwenhlangano kanye nomuntu ngamunye, ahunyushwe ngokuphikisana okulandela izimpawu eziyindida futhi ezingaqondakali kahle eziboniswa yilawa mazinga amabili amakhulu. Ukuncikana nokuxhasana okuntekenteke phakathi kwalawa mazinga, okuyinhlangano kanye nomuntu ngamunye, kwakha uhlaka oluxhumene lapho kunzima ukutomula nokugagula ngokucacile izingxenye ezakhe izenzo nezinyathelo zenhlangano ezingxenyeni ezakhe izenzo zomuntu ngamunye, ngaphandle kokuqaqa nokuhlukanisa ingxenye ngayinye eyakhe inhlangano ebumbene. Lawa magalelo ocwaningo aqininisekisa futhi asekele indida-mqondo (intellectual puzzle) ebihlose ukuqonda kanye/noma ukubuyisa ukuzimelela komuntu ngamunye esimweni senhlalo-masiko yenhlangano ukuze kuzuzwe ukuvikeleka kwenhlangano nozinzo-kulingana (equilibrium) emva koguquko olwenzekile enhlanganweni. Imiphumelangqangi etholakale kulolu cwaningo lwamanje ayinakuthathwa njengemiphumela engaphinde isetshenziswe futhi iqondaniswe nezimo ezitholakala kwezinye izikhungo eziyisikhombisa zomhlinzeki we-PHE.

List of abbreviations

| | |
|--------|--|
| CAQDAS | – Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software |
| CMC | – Computer-mediated communication |
| HE | – Higher education |
| JSE | – Johannesburg Stock Exchange |
| ICR | – Inter-coder reliability |
| NDP | – National Development Plan |
| PHE | – Private higher education |
| SAP | – strategy-as-practice |
| SAPP | – Strategy as process and practice |
| SMS | – Short message service |
| UNISA | – University of South Africa |

Definition of Key Terms

The key terms used in this study are defined as follows:

Agency: Agency refers to purposeful action by practitioners to reflect and transform conditions in organisational social contexts (Vaara & Whittington, 2012).

Middle managers: Strategy-as-practice practitioners like Thomas-Gregory (2014) and Floyd (2012, 2016) define middle managers as having an intermediate position between top management and first-level supervision which allows them to influence those around them and to shape the organisation through the doing of strategy (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011).

Organisational social structure: The sense-making practices and the social structure of the organisation constitute each other (Owens, 2001; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005; Nicolini, 2012) within the context of human actors and strategy. There could be **enabling and/or constraining influences** within the organisational social structure within which these agents operate.

Sense-making: Rouleau and Balogun (2011) and Rouleau (2014) define sense-making as a 'social process of meaning construction and reconstruction through which managers understand, interpret, and create sense for themselves and others of their changing organisational context'. **Embodied sense-making** is defined as acting your way into meaning (Colville, Pye & Brown, 2016). **Retrospective and prospective sense-making** is defined as understanding organisational complexity backward (retrospective) to make sense of the way forward (prospective) (Colville *et al.*, 2016).

Strategy-as-practice: This is a distinct field of research that studies strategic management, organisational decision-making and managerial work with a focus on micro-level social processes and practices that characterise organisational strategy and strategising (Jarzabkowski, Balogun & Seidl, 2007; Johnson, Melin & Whittington, 2003).

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Chapter 1: Research orientation

No one replied because we were too busy silently screaming. Our bodies felt like milk bottles and our souls were bees trapped inside.

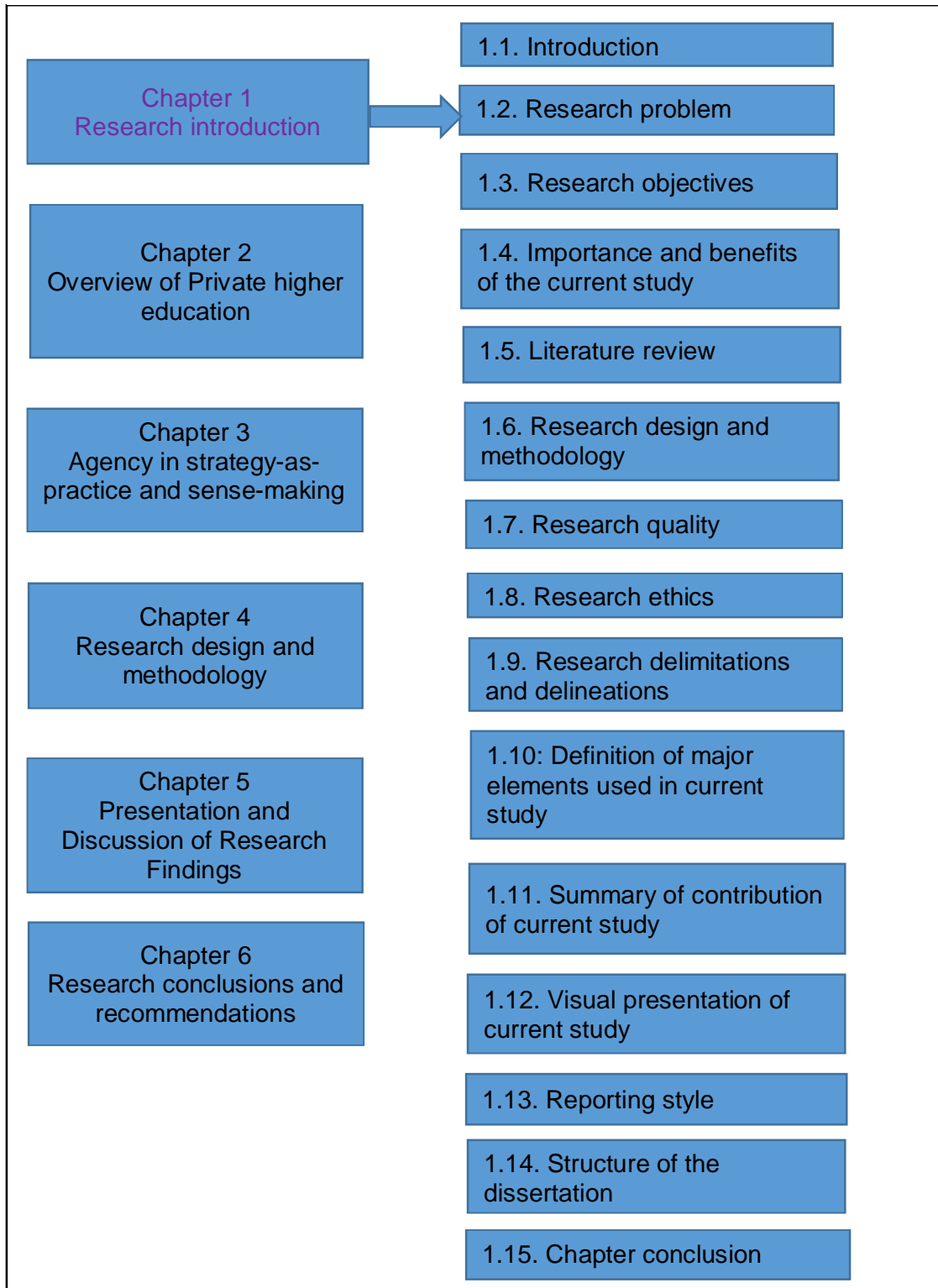
– Darrel Bristow - Bovey

1.1. Introduction

Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of the background of the current study, the problem statement, the research questions, and the importance and benefits of the current study. The chapter further sets out the delimitations of the current study, the research design and methodology, and considers the research ethics of the current study.

Figure 1.1. shows Chapter 1 in relation to the research dissertation.

Figure 1 : Structure of Chapter 1



(source: own compilation, 2018)

1.1.1. Background

Irrespective of the nature of the organisation, one commonality exists: agents. All organisations are built around a number of agents, or individuals. These individuals, or human actors, have the capacity for agency as well as opportunity for their own sense-making and for social influence within the structure of the organisation. The socio-economic interaction of middle managers with colleagues both above and below them in the hierarchy of the social structure of the organisation is what shapes the sense-making around strategic outcomes. Strategy is constituted and enacted organisationally. The contention is that social roles and relationships within social structures provide organisational security as they are constitutive of each other, especially in times of change, and that, without the interdependence of social roles and social structure, confusion would reign and sense-making would be difficult (Whittington, 2007).

The constitutive and relational aspect of this current study is carried through to the research context in the interdependence (Jarzabkowski, 2003) between public and private higher education provision to realise the educational developmental mandate of South Africa. There are nearly a million students registered at South Africa's 20 public universities and 6 universities of technology (Govender, 2015). There are 124 private higher education (PHE) providers registered in the Department of Higher Education's Register of Private Higher Education providers, with an additional 96 provisionally registered PHE providers (Council on Higher Education, 2013). The PHE provider used for the current study, as a Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) listed company, has eight educational brands spread across South Africa, one of which is the research setting for this current study. Private higher education providers have had to adapt to a dynamic higher education landscape within South Africa which has impacted on the role and identities of internal administrative middle managers. The educational brand has reoriented the working practices of the middle managers for operational efficiency at the case organisation. This reorientation has required that the middle managers work across functional boundaries which has adversely impacted their daily organisational lives.

During these times of change and orientation, this current study explored micro-level strategising practices at the selected educational brand of a PHE provider so as to open up novel insights into strategising and the experiential world of actors. Such a bottom-up approach demonstrates how humans inform or embed practice, which, in turn, establishes the routines of an organisation as argued in an initial, and therefore seminal, paper, on micro-strategising (Johnson, Melin & Whittington, 2003).

It is important to understand how people engage at this situated level for the ongoing health of the organisation and to garner balanced views of the organisation, to develop more attuned insights into contexts of strategy. Given that the reorientation of work practices occurs on an annual basis, tracking such middle managers' responses is important. The organisational restructuring created strain and pressure for all, but, especially, the middle managers. One of the consequences of the efficiency measures was a high staff turnover, which necessitated the shuffling of positions and daily work practices to make do with less staff members. These changes in the working practices required then that the middle managers now work across functional boundaries, as mentioned earlier. These changes impacted on the structure, systems, job roles and responsibilities and human relations in the operations division. Additionally, the changes followed a top-down approach (refer Annexure 15). Hence, micro-level exploration of the sense that middle managers made of the change and if/how change affected their daily practice, is deemed important (Johnson *et al.*, 2003).

1.1.2. Research setting

The setting as described here sets up the conditions for the applied problem, as described subsequently, that the current study seeks to explore. The reorientation of work practices occurs in an educational environment that is private, as opposed to public, and consequently approaches education provision from a commercial perspective. The educational brand operates in a highly competitive educational industry that needs to demonstrate successful strategy, stability and sustainability for commercial viability. The current study therefore is a deeper dive into context- rich

data which is not opened up through a more mainstream view of strategy, as per the classic economists' views (Paroutis, Heracleous & Angwin, 2016).

1.2. Research problem

This section first explains the real-life problem and then shows how current scholarly views have gone some way to illustrate the problem, but also how they advocate that more research is needed.

The *real-life* issue is that the work environment created a situated confluence of middle managers who are now 'impelled' to be part of strategy (restructuring, resignations and downsizing). They are, it is posited, enabled through informal means (their support of each other and sense-making) and are dis-enabled, or constrained, through formal means (the structure and current strategies that are perhaps incoherently dynamic – as the organisation over-relies on executive human agency without including the next level. The strategic orientation is therefore top-down. This creates the 'sandwich pressure' of the middle managers, which has been observed in real life. The dilemmas of the middle managers' role in strategy are chosen for investigation because of their problematic nature. The educational brand of the PHE provider needs to address its approach to changing and remaining competitive in the light of the tight squeeze on middle managers and how it may influence the organisation.

At a more predominant level of strategy, classic economic strategies have used the macro-content level, and to a lesser extent, the macro-process level, as focal points (Ansoff, Declerck & Hayes, 1976; Ansoff, 1979, 1987; Grant, 2003). In shifts that entail a more complex world, theoreticians and practitioners saw the need for strategy work and research that deals specifically with the actions and interactions of multiple managerial levels, within and around, the daily strategy practices (known as strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski, Balogun & Seidl, 2007; Johnson, Melin & Whittington, 2003)). Hence, this current study, following strategy-as-practice, favours managerial agency and situated action. With humans being the focal point of strategy, and not strategy as 'the plan', both incremental stability and change are to be probed as *theoretical gaps*. In addition, strategy-as-practice has an almost anthropological

orientation, where scholars are invited to delve deep into organisations to engage with strategy activity in its intimate detail, hence, the phenomenon is described as ‘micro-strategy’ (Johnson *et al.*, 2003; Paroutis *et al.*, 2016). This research problematises and responds to the invitation.

The research thus focuses on what strategy-as-practices lenses throw up with regard to the research question. This answers the call to explore the often emotive and invisible dimensions of strategy work (Suddaby, Seidl & Lê, 2013). In probing the theoretical gaps, the following view is, therefore, positioned. The instrumental reason for the importance of multiple-level and micro-based views of strategy, therefore, is that layers of managers manage day-to-day activities. If we are to aid management and the survival of organisations, we need to achieve a higher degree of reflexivity amongst those actors about what they are doing and their affects as ‘do-ers’ of strategy. In line with this thinking, the focused attention on middle managers in influencing and shaping strategic outcomes are relevant areas for future research, as provided in the latest literature (Burgelman, Floyd, Laamanen, Mantere, Vaara & Whittington, 2018) (refer Chapter 3 where this is reviewed in depth). Much of the influential literature on strategy, important as it is, has left the middle managers bereft of manager insights, let alone guidelines for action, at this micro-level.

The current study moves the focus from top management to middle management (refer Chapter 3) through its applied gap of a research problem of practice reorientation by middle managers at a PHE provider. This focus is in keeping with Burgelman *et al.* (2018) who advocate strategy from a middle management practice and process perspective.

1.2.1. Research assumption

The purposeful choice of strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012) and Weickian sense-making (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeldt, 2005) as core theoretical lenses considers the implications of strategy from a human perspective (Babbie, 2007). It is assumed that there is a reciprocal relationship between the micro-level practices of the middle managers within an enabling and/or constraining organisational social

structure. It is also assumed that middle managers are able to shape strategic outcomes through their micro practices of agency and sense-making. This current study also corroborates the assumption that social roles and relationships within organisational social structures provide organisational security (Owens, 2001) as they are constitutive of each other (Nicolini, 2012; Clegg, 2012). The assumption, too, is that the research problem and questions may be addressed by a qualitative approach, within an assumed receptive research setting.

1.2.2. Research statement

Middle managers exercise agency through making sense of change within the enabling and/or constraining conditions of an organisation. Their agency and sense-making are located at the micro-level of the organisation with such activities impelling strategy and influencing strategic outcomes.

1.2.3. Research questions

I formulated the following research questions in response to the interpretive-constructivist research design of the current study (Cresswell, Hanson, Clark & Morales, 2007). The characteristics of research questions in qualitative research relate to context, meaning, unit of analysis, depth and process (Haverkamp & Young, 2007) which the following research questions adhere to. I gave the research questions identifiable, alphabetical monikers:

The primary research question:

A: How do middle managers as agents of change shape strategic outcomes within an organisational social structure during and after strategic change implementation?

The secondary research questions:

A1: How does the sense-making practice influence the strategic change intent within an organisational social structure during and after strategic change implementation?

A2: How is the organisational social structure an enabling and/or constraining environment for the middle manager to shape and influence strategic outcomes during and after strategic change implementation?

1.3. Research objectives

The shaping of strategic outcomes by middle managers suggests agency within the enabling and/or constraining structure of an organisation and sense-making practice within that organisational social structure. The research objectives of this current study endeavoured to uncover how that shaping was influenced by formulating the following objectives. I gave the research objectives identifiable, alphabetical markers:

B: To explore how the agency of middle managers shape strategic outcomes within an organisational social structure during and after strategic change implementation

B1: To explore how the middle managers make sense of and shape strategic intent within an organisational social structure during and after strategic change implementation

B2: To explore how the organisational social structure provides an enabling and/or constraining environment for the agency and sense-making of middle managers within an organisational social structure during and after strategic change implementation.

I have aligned the research questions and research objectives in Chapter 4 Table 4.1.

1.4. Importance and benefits of the current study

The current study has the following importance and benefits.

1.4.1. Benefits for strategy-as-practice perspective

The benefits of the current study are two-fold. Firstly, the research adds to the strategy-as-practice body of knowledge by focusing on the role of the middle manager (Davis, 2013; Jansen Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2014; Thomas-Gregory, 2014; Floyd, 2012; 2016) and this study fleshes out the cited contributions by focusing on the administrative middle manager. Administrative middle managers are distinctive in that

they are pivotal to the operational functioning of the educational institution. Their core function is providing administrative capacity to support the academic mission of the institution. Previous strategy research has concentrated on top management as formulators of strategy (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012) and hardly on the role of administrative middle managers (Bhayat, 2012). The theoretical and applied gap of this current study modestly contributes to the strategy-as-practice body of knowledge in its exploration of the micro-strategising practices of *administrative* middle managers at the educational brand of a PHE provider. Previous research has focused on *academic* middle managers in public higher education (Deem, 2000; Thomas-Gregory, 2014; Meek, Goedegebuure, Santiago & Carvalho, 2010; Floyd, 2016). The contribution of this current study is that administrative middle managers, who are perceived to be 'invisible' (Dobson, 2000: 203), have the ability, through their micro-practices of agency and sense-making, towards strategic outcomes, to become 'visible' (own quotation marks), as per the call to render the invisible visible (Suddaby, Seidl & Lê, 2013).

1.4.2. Benefits for Weickian sense-making

The contribution of this current study is that it applies a strategy-as-practice perspective in conjunction with Weickian sense-making (Weick *et al.*, 2005) in its exploration of how the agency and practice of middle managers could shape strategic outcomes within an enabling and/or constraining organisational social structure over time. Vaara and Whittington (2012) highlighted this as an ongoing theoretical gap to be explored. The current study aims to contribute to the call by Vaara and Whittington (2012) to move from the functional view of the role of middle managers to a reciprocal view. The current study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge around the mutual relationality of sense-making and the social structure of the organisation in an effort towards stability and sustainability (Owens, 2001; Weick *et al.*, 2005; Nicolini, 2012).

1.4.3. Methodological contribution

This current study also aims to modestly contribute in an incremental manner to the qualitative research body of knowledge on data gathering computer-mediated and/or

mobile communication (CMC) technology (Salmons, 2016) through byte-size, techno-attuned so-called 'nano narratives' (Williamson, 2016: 863) or text messages and e-mail journals (Jones & Woolley, 2015; Filep, Turner, Eidse, Thompson-Fawcett & Fitzsimons, 2017) (refer Chapter 4 sections 4.7.1 and 4.7.2) as an emergent method in data gathering.

1.5. Literature Review

The literature review develops a conceptual and theoretical understanding of the phenomenon and concepts to be investigated within the interpretive/constructivist paradigm (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). It refines the purpose of the current study and serves as background to the formulation of the research questions. I provide overviews of the main theoretical lenses of strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012) and Weickian (Weick *et al.*, 2005) sense-making to position the current study in the body of knowledge (refer Chapter 2). This theoretical exposition serves as a backdrop to explicate the research problem and intellectual puzzle (refer section 1.2). The review also provides rebuttals of the theoretical concepts. It is to be noted that some references included in this current study, considered seminal studies, predate the expected five years (Williamson, 2013).

1.6. Research design and methodology

1.6.1. Research methodology

I situated the current study in an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2006) (refer Chapter 4 section 4.1) which was driven by the three research questions (Cresswell *et al.*, 2007) (refer section 1.5). I used a qualitative approach (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Grbich, 2013) as a lens to make sense of the participants' lived, subjective interpretations. I chose a single case study, working intrinsically, of an educational brand of a PHE provider as a deliberate choice to explore the research questions (Stake, 1995). This real-world research context allows a temporal and

spatial exploration of an intrinsic case study (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) through individual interpretation of organisational life (Yin, 2010; Harding, 2013) over time.

1.6.2. Research design

I used CMC technology (Salmons, 2016) eliciting data through methods of nano narratives (Williamson, 2016), as text messages, and e-mail journals (refer Chapter 4 sections 4.7.1 and 4.7.2) to gather the interpretations of the lived organisational context during and after strategic change implementation over time. I gathered data over four months. I used thematic analysis of data (Fenton & Langley, 2011) systematically to manually analyse the data. The co-coder (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013) coded the data descriptively supported by ATLAS.ti 7™. I used first-cycle analysis through data-driven inductive coding and second-cycle analysis through structural-driven deductive coding in response to the research questions to explore the participants' lived contextual reality (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Grbich, 2013; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). The unit of analysis were the sense-making micro-practices of strategy practitioners in their roles as middle managers. Their response to change was also inherently part of the analysis. The seven participants at the educational brand of a PHE provider, who formed the sample, were purposively selected to participate in the research (Harding, 2013).

1.6.3. Reflexive journal

I kept a reflexive journal (refer Annexure 15) while conducting the current study as it was an ongoing record of my experiences, reactions and emerging awareness during the study to reflect on what transpired during the research process (Yin, 2010; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Paulus, Lester & Dempster, 2014). I used my personal journal to further my understanding of the primary data from the research participants. It did not form part of data gathering or data analysis, but acted in the service of my meta-analysis moments.

1.7. Research quality

The quality of a qualitative research study is enhanced through credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Babbie, 2007).

1.7.1. Credibility

The current study used thematic analysis and an inter-coder analysis approach to compare and corroborate data to ensure that it adhered to the precepts of the aforementioned criteria. Both approaches provide an audit trail for credibility of data gathering and analysis (refer Annexures 12, 13 and 14) (refer Chapter 4 section 4.10.1).

1.7.2. Confirmability

Comparing and corroboration between data analysis approaches to arrive at patterns of similarity, or disagreement, ensures confirmability of data (refer Chapter 4 section 4.10.4).

1.7.3. Dependability

The combination of data analysis techniques avoided anomalies in the data and minimised methodological biases pertaining to dependability and confirmability (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b; MacPhail, Khoza, Abler & Ranganathan, 2015) (refer Chapter 4 section 4.10.4).

1.7.4. Transferability

A full description of research design and research methodology would enable another researcher to follow the research process that I used in this current study (refer Chapter 4 section 4.10.3).

1.8. Research ethics

My consideration in this current study regarding ethics was not to harm the participants in accordance with the primary ethical premise when working with human participants in a research study (Babbie, 2007). I explained the concept of voluntary participation to the participants (refer Annexures 2 and 4) in accordance with the basic ethical rule of social research (Babbie, 2007). To protect the identity and responses of the participants, I also explained the concepts of confidentiality and anonymity to the participants (Babbie, 2007) (refer Annexure 4).

The current research study was subjected to review to guarantee the safe design and ethical conduct of the proposed research study. Ethical approval was obtained from the Unisa College of Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Review Committee, the Department of Business Management and the educational brand of the PHE provider, to conduct the current study and before participants were approached to take part in the current study. The educational brand wanted to remain anonymous and referred to as the 'educational brand of a private higher education provider' (refer Annexure 3).

1.9. Research delimitations and delineation

The following section provides the delimitations and delineations of the current study (refer Chapter 4 Table 8). The current study delimits on the basis of strategy-as-practice and sense-making theories and not on mainstream economic theory. It also delimits on qualitative, interpretivist, constructivist approach as opposed to quantitative approach. It uses an intrinsic single case study as opposed to an instrumental or collective case study; multiple case studies in the private sector; or cases in the public sector. It uses CMC technology to gather data as opposed to online or face-to-face interviewing. It uses manual and electronic coding through ATLAS.ti 7™ inductively and deductively as opposed to using only manual, electronic coding or theory-based coding. In this current study, data were collected from only one of the eight educational brands of the PHE provider. The other seven educational brands were not included in the current study. The research limitation is that the findings of the current study are not generalisable.

1.10: Definition of major elements used in current study

The major elements used in this current study are defined as follows:

1.10.1: Agency

Agency refers to purposeful action by practitioners to reflect and transform conditions in organisational social contexts (Vaara & Whittington, 2012).

1.10.2. Middle managers

Strategy-as-practice practitioners like Thomas-Gregory (2014) and Floyd (2012, 2016) define middle managers as having an intermediate position between top management and first-level supervision which allows them to influence those around them and to shape the organisation through the doing of strategy (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011).

1.10.3: Organisational social structure

The sense-making practices and the social structure of the organisation constitute each other (Owens, 2001; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005; Nicolini, 2012) within the context of human actors and strategy. There could be **enabling and/or constraining influences** within the organisational social structure within which these agents operate.

1.10.4: Sense-making

Rouleau and Balogun (2011) and Rouleau (2014) define sense-making as a 'social process of meaning construction and reconstruction through which managers understand, interpret, and create sense for themselves and others of their changing organisational context'. **Embodied sense-making** is defined as acting your way into meaning (Colville, Pye & Brown, 2016). **Retrospective and prospective sense-**

making is defined as understanding organisational complexity backward (retrospective) to make sense of the way forward (prospective) (Colville *et al.*, 2016).

1.10.5: Strategy-as-practice

This is a distinct field of research that studies strategic management, organisational decision-making and managerial work with a focus on micro-level social processes and practices that characterise organisational strategy and strategising (Jarzabkowski, Balogun & Seidl, 2007; Johnson, Melin & Whittington, 2003).

1.11. Summary of contribution of current study

The current study has made a modest contribution to the body of knowledge in its exploration of the micro-strategising practices of administrative middle managers in an organisational social structure from their lived organisational social experience over time. The finding was that middle managers used micro-strategising practices of cognitive and emotional sense-making (Thompson & Stapleton, 2009) retrospectively and prospectively (Colville *et al.*, 2016) and embodied sense-making (Thompson & Stapleton, 2009; Colville *et al.*, 2016, or agency (Vaara & Whittington, 2012), to navigate a contradictory, disempowering organisational socio-cultural context that is both enabling and constraining (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007).

It is also to be noted that there is a porous inter-dependency between the two discrete levels of organisation and individual. The inter-dependency has been identified through the 'dotted-line relationships' within the graphics (refer Chapter 5 Figure 5.6). The inter-dependency has been interpreted through the inconsistent embedded practices following the numerous references to the equivocal signals that the two discrete, main levels demonstrate (refer Chapter 5 section 5.5). Embedded practices inevitably create an inter-woven entity where the strands of individual and organisational action are difficult to pull out and name distinctly without unravelling the organisational socio-cultural tapestry (Vaara & Durand, 2012; Feldman & Worline, 2016). These contributions affirm the intellectual puzzle which sought to understand

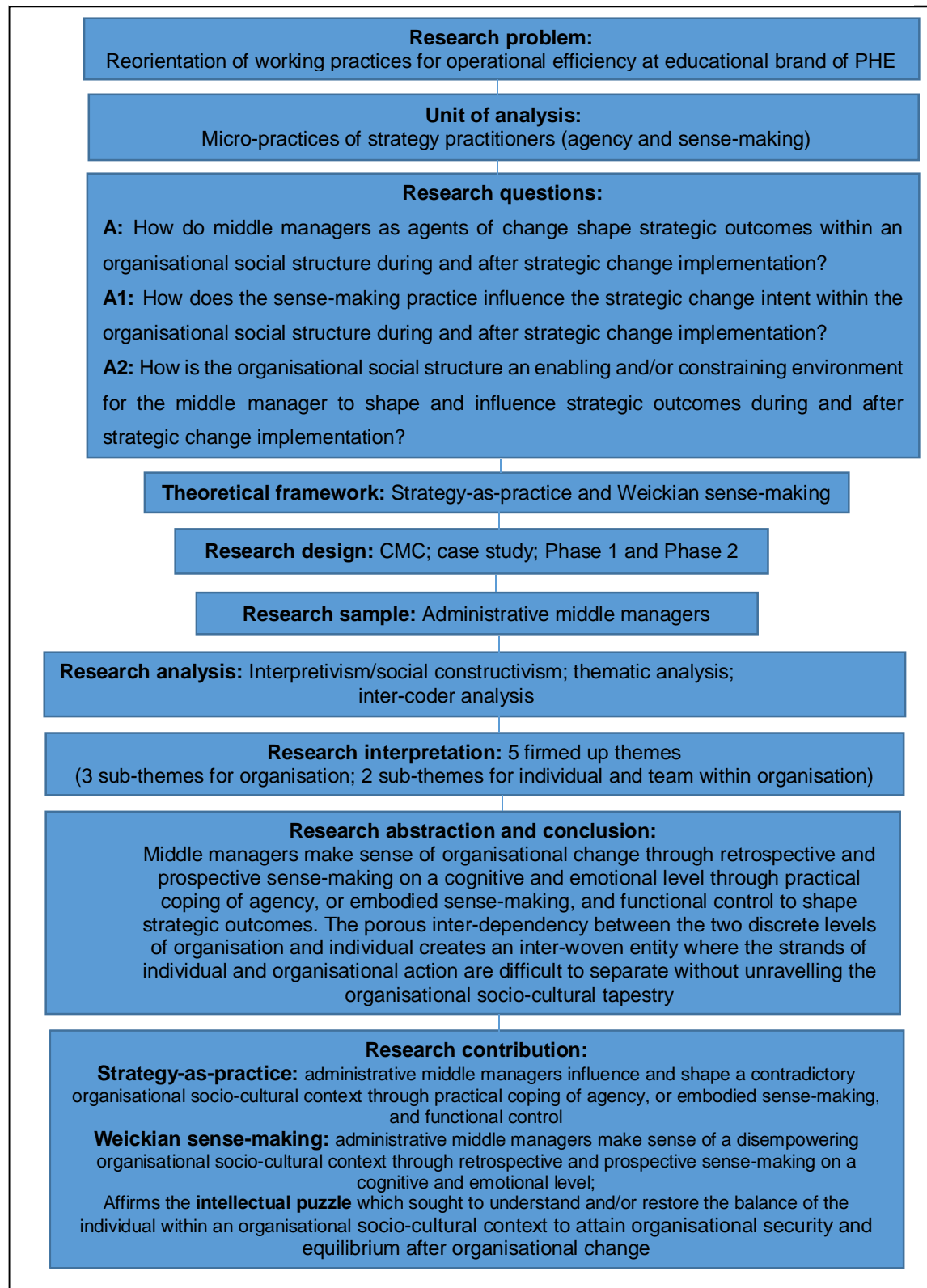
and/or restore the balance of the individual within an organisational socio-cultural context to attain organisational security and equilibrium after organisational change (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011).

Through an emergent research design of text messages and e-mail journals (Salmons, 2016; Jones & Woolley, 2015; Filep *et al.*, 2017) through story-telling over time, these embedded practices were revealed in the data.

1.12. Visual presentation of current study

Figure 1.2. below visually conceptualises the modest contribution of the current study in relation to the research problem and context, the unit of analysis, the research questions, the theoretical framework, the research design and methodology, the research analysis, interpretation and abstraction, and, finally, the research contribution.

Figure 1.2: Diagram of current research study



(source: own compilation, 2018)

1.13. Reporting style

Based on the chosen theoretical perspectives (refer Chapter 3) and the context of the research (refer Chapter 2), I wish to indicate at this early stage, that the dissertation is written in the first person. This was done on the basis of: 'Strategy researchers should try to remain the cognising ... affective first person narrator they are rather than escaping into the third person conventions of anonymity' (Floyd, Roos, Jacobs & Kellerman, 2005: 260; Grbich, 2013: 304). The foregrounding of the 'I' is a conscious choice as I am dealing with sentient, living, human issues when dealing with strategy (Williamson, 2013), namely, the strategy-as-practice lens that centres the human (Whittington, 2006) as my dissertation affirms.

The introductory quotations to Chapters 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6 by Bristow-Bovey (2017) resonated with me when I read them. I had been searching for quotations that would aptly describe the reflective journey that the participants in the study had embarked on. I found what I had been searching for in the last opinion piece by Bristow-Bovey (2017) as he reflected on the closure of *The Times* in December 2017. The same can be said about the introductory quotation to Chapter 2 by Jansen (2017b) from the same newspaper. Needless to say, I admire the writing (and opinion) of both gentlemen and felt that their words succinctly described not only the context but also the tone of the current study. The introductory quotations should be read from the perspective of the participants: a movement from darkness to light.

1.14. Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation is structured in the following way:

Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of the introduction and background to the current study, the problem statement and the primary and secondary questions.

Chapter 2 provides the research context. It offers an overview of the HE environment in South Africa with a focus on the complementary role of PHE within this context. The chapter also describes the educational brand of a PHE provider as the case study for the current study.

Chapter 3 offers a review of previous research of the theoretical perspectives of strategy-as-practice and Weickian sense-making. It provides a literature backdrop to how middle managers exercise agency through making sense of change within the enabling and/or constraining conditions of an organisation.

Chapter 4 describes the research design and methodology employed in the current study. The content of the chapter revolves around the research strategy adopted, the selection of the participants, the data gathering method, the data analysis process, the scope and delimitations, and the ethical considerations of the research design.

Chapter 5 analyses, interprets and abstracts the data of the current study. This chapter provides rich descriptions which are substantiated by verbatim quotes to facilitate interpretation and abstraction.

Chapter 6 draws conclusions from the findings in relation to the primary and secondary research questions. The chapter further outlines contributions and limitations of the current study, and makes recommendations for future research.

1.15. Chapter conclusion

Chapter 1 provided the research background and an orientation of the current study in relation to the research problem, the purpose and research questions, the importance of the study, the delimitations and the ethical considerations of the current study.

Chapter 2 will provide an overview of the research context and the higher education environment in South Africa with a focus on the complementary role of private higher education within this context.

Chapter 2: Overview of Private higher education

Knowledge is either something from the past that needs to be corrected (let's call this corrective knowledge) or something for the future that needs to be appropriated (let's call this prospective knowledge) ... Great nations invest in prospective knowledge ... This can of course be done with strong leadership.

– Jonathan Jansen

2.1. Introduction

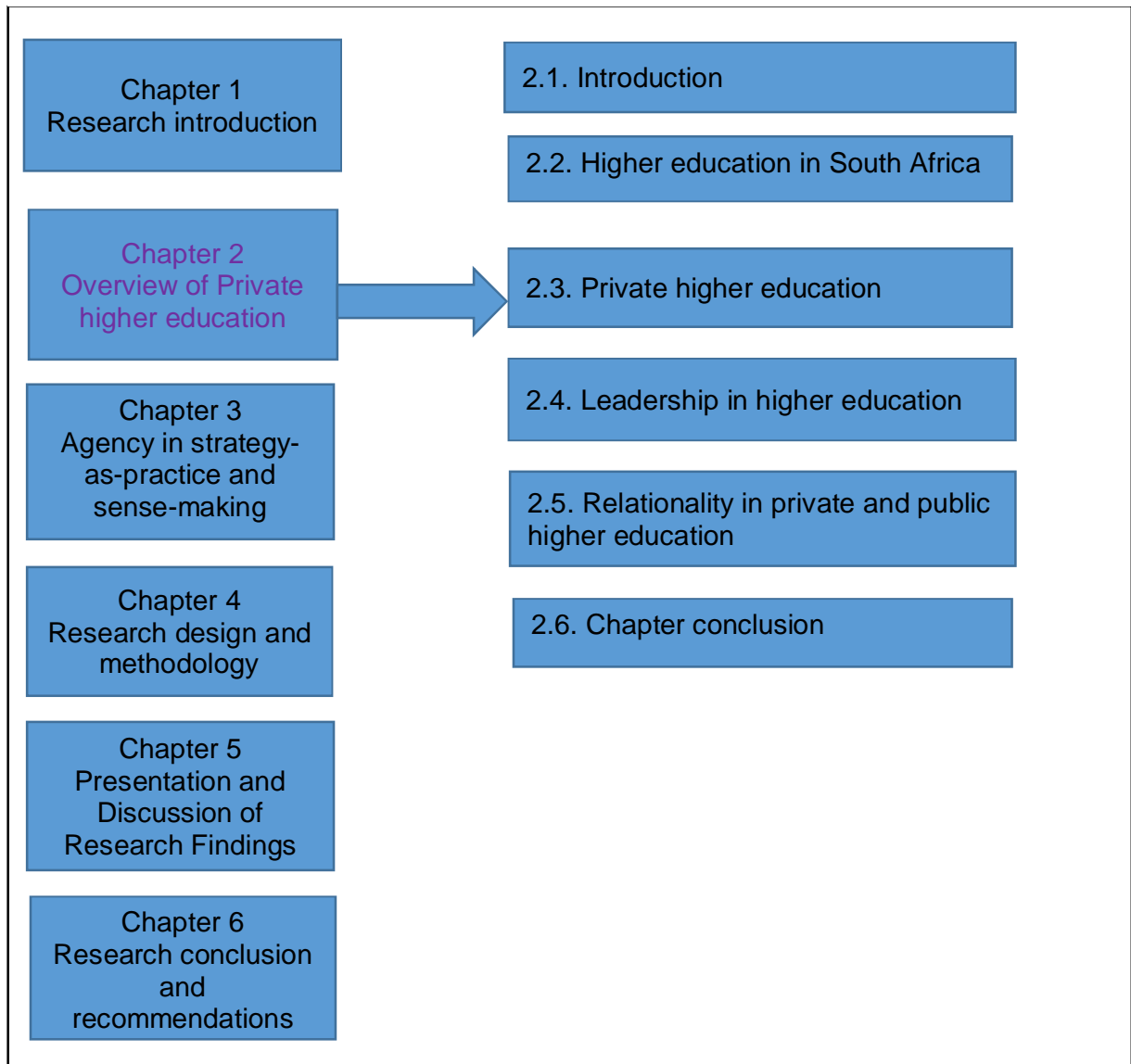
This chapter provides the context for the current study and reinforces the applied (real life) gaps that were introduced in Chapter 1 (refer section 1.2). This chapter heeds the call for strategy research to be practically relevant (Vaara & Durand, 2012). The chapter provides an overview of the juxtaposition of PHE against the sector of public higher education (HE) in South Africa. In support of the purpose of this current study, the chapter recognises that practice theory focuses on dichotomies as conceptual categories that provide opportunities to illustrate how inseparable the two sectors are. The public and private sectors inter-depend in order to provide HE for a significant demographic of South Africa and internationally. The dichotomy between stability and change in the education sector in South Africa is no exception. The HE space in South Africa has been volatile (Jansen, 2017) coupled with a global movement towards introducing corporate approaches to HE management and governance (Meek *et al.*, 2010). A complementary role between public and private HE sectors could play a pivotal role in guiding a country's economic prosperity (Meek *et al.*, 2010; Porter, 2010), as will be elucidated in due course (refer section 2.3).

Tsoukas and Chia (2002: 569) contend that 'change ... is pervasive and indivisible'. The paradigm of this chapter is also that of a mainstream argument and does not adopt a critical or post-modern approach. The mainstream argument assumes education to have foundational international (neo-liberal) premises that are then adopted for localised delivery and understanding. These premises set up the view that education should be delivered on the basis of ensuring socio-economic stability and national growth as well as human development.

Chapter 2 in relation to the research process

Figure 2.1 shows Chapter 2 in relation to the research process.

Figure 2.1: Structure of Chapter 2



(source: own compilation, 2018)

2.2. Higher education in South Africa

This section explains HE in a developing middle-income economy like South Africa. As South Africa competes in a globalised space and generates knowledge and

innovation, a robust, locally and globally relevant HE environment remains essential. This requires a research infrastructure and entrepreneurial culture that can foster innovation as well as an educational environment to support knowledge acquisition, skill development, and critical thinking among the nation's workforce (Lane, 2012). Drawing on Porter (1990), Lane (2012) argues more fully that to educate is to innovate with local formulations of innovation and education, creating growth and advantage, and not a global 'one size fits all.'

Education is also perceived to be the key to equality and equity in society, which has a special significance for a country that is highly unequal based on historical circumstances that oppressed and excluded the majority of the population. Educational institutions, both public and private, are seen as the vehicles for social change and economic prosperity (Lane, 2012). Lane (2012) bolsters the view that they are interlocutors of individuals with educational needs to meet the flux of a dynamic and changing world. In preparing for change, they also have to provide a stable environment within their organisational social structures to make that change happen – an integration and interdependence of stability and change.

The genesis of educational institutions in South Africa is intertwined with its history from an early sustainable, creative community, then to a colonial outpost, a colony and illegitimate republic. As a democracy, from 1994, it evolved into an emerging economy with the concomitant responsibility of empowering the populace through education. A Department of Higher Education and Training was created, with the Department of Basic Education splitting off, which signaled the emphasis that the new democracy was placing on Higher Education and Training as a significant generator of growth and development. The National Development Plan (NDP) takes up this imperative and creates a plan for HET until 2030. The NDP made overhauling the education system in South Africa one of its many priorities (Nxasana, 2016). Improving the education sector feeds into its vision of a more knowledge-intensive economy. Improving the education sector feeds into its vision of a more knowledge-intensive economy to improve the lives of the citizens of South Africa (www.poa.gov.za, n.d.). Levy (2015) sees the role of private higher education (PHE) institutions as complementary to the offerings of the public HE institutions to cope with the increasing number of school leavers (Govender, 2015) who wish to enroll for tertiary education. Middle managers

form the bedrock of educational institutions, and administrative middle managers in particular render vital operational capabilities and support to the smooth-running of the academic service in both public and private educational institutions (Meek *et al.*, 2010; Bhayat, 2012). This current study, which explores strategising by middle managers in the operations division of an educational brand of a PHE institution during times of change and re-orientation, may well highlight the centrality of middle managers as being core to the success and sustainability of such PHE institutions.

2.2.1. Change in higher education

As this chapter provides the context for this current study, it should be emphasised that this section provides a brief overview of the genesis of the HE environment in South Africa. It is seen through a particular lens of sources consulted as per the citations herein, with particular indebtedness to Kruss (2005), and in terms of the paradigmatic orientation as covered in the orientation (refer Chapter 1).

The HE genesis cannot be explained without telling the story of how PHE began in South Africa – public and private education provision are intertwined. Kruss (2005) traces the relationship between private and public HE in South Africa through a systematic empirical exploration of its genesis. According to Kruss (2005), HE provision originated in private initiatives like the South African College which was established in 1829 and provided a general secondary education to the affluent. As a response to the demands of a colonial economy and society, private post-secondary education institutions emerged to train teachers and other professionals. The seed of vocational imperatives in HE had begun. Legitimacy was established as these private institutions became legislatively incorporated to lay the foundation for public provision of HE in South Africa as it developed in the 19th century.

Kruss (2005) continues the education exposition by emphasising that economic prosperity for the developing economy of South Africa meant growth in the mining and manufacturing sectors with the discovery of gold and diamonds. The need for advanced technical and vocational education was addressed by mining houses and churches when they established private technical, vocational and industrial colleges.

Kruss (2005) mentions that private higher education expanded its vocational training in line with the economic imperatives of a growing economy. Legitimacy was further entrenched as these private colleges became legislatively incorporated as public higher education institutions progressing to become universities alongside those established earlier in the 19th century. The South African College later became the University of Cape Town in 1918. Professional Institutes emerged during this period to later become examining bodies and professional associations. The new public HE institutions struck collaborative agreements with these private institutes whereby they offered tuition on their behalf to qualified professionals on a part-time basis. For instance, the University of South Africa (Unisa) was founded in 1873 as the University of Cape of Good Hope in Cape Town. Unisa moved to Pretoria in 1916 and changed its name to its present moniker in 1918. It is the largest open distance learning institution on the African continent and the longest surviving institution of its ilk globally (www.unisa.ac.za/sites/sbl/default/About/History).

Kruss (2005) found that government intervention in education provision in South Africa became evident during this period. By 1948, education provision in South Africa became racially segregated and imbued with different statuses and prestige to meet the needs of an apartheid government and its industrial economy. Private colleges and Unisa offered tuition by correspondence to an increasingly black student population. These colleges increasingly came to lack prestige and value. The 1970s to 1980s saw a growth in private institutions in response to a demand for skills provision which the public sector did not address. Economic sanctions in the 1980s provided fertile ground for collaborative franchise agreements between local institutions in a developing economy and foreign higher education institutions from developed economies. Internationally accredited certification in business, management, information technology and vocational fields came to have a high value on the demand side in a developing economy like South Africa.

According to Kruss (2005), the 1990s saw collaborative agreements between private education providers and public distance education institutions. These collaborative agreements came about because of a perceived failure of public institutions to provide a secure learning environment. There were also collaborative partnerships between local public universities and private institutions with a view to expand student

enrollment and to counter-acting perceived cuts in the state subsidy. Their collaborative strategy was to establish satellite campuses in areas not served well by public institutions. The collaborative-relationship agreements were initially supported by government to ensure quality in private education provision. Gradually the government grew sceptical about the abuse of state subsidies by public institutions and the rapid growth of the partnerships. The DET introduced legislation to regulate these partnerships between public and private education institutions.

This exposition of the genesis of HE in South Africa (Kruss, 2005) highlights that HE in South Africa has undergone a number of changes in its efforts to deliver on its economic and social development imperatives within a globalised HE market. It is within this complex educational environment that the current study endeavours to explore middle managers at an educational brand of a PHE provider and their micro-strategising practices after change implementation.

2.2.2. Duality within higher education

Even though the government of South Africa through its DET recognises the complementary role of the PHE providers, it also places regulatory frameworks around PHE provision through regulation, accreditation and quality control (refer section 2.3.1). Jansen, Herman, Matentjie, Morake, Pillay, Sehoole, and Weber (2007) feel that the ambivalent role of the DET plays itself out in the dual imperatives between globalisation and nationalism on a bigger scale and between the rights of individuals and that of society on a smaller scale. For Jansen *et al.* (2007), HE institutions have the ability to change in response to their changing external environment. This ability reflects their agility to become 'socially embedded' institutions that are able to manifest utility, diversity and flexibility. Change is not linear, uniform or predictable in educational social contexts. Rather, change implementation in HE is interpreted by real actors in real institutions through their practices and is shaped by particular institutional contexts (Jansen *et al.*, 2007; Jansen, 2017).

Ngqakayi-Motaung (2007: 103) examines the concept of public HE as a 'public good' by proffering a vision for the transformation of public HE as 'a higher education that

meets national development needs'. New managerialism, as will be explained in due course, embraces the idea of public service as opposed to the profit-driven motives of PHE (Deem, 2004). Kruss (2004: 1) does not see PHE provision as 'bad' or public HE provision as a 'public good'. She rather espouses a view where public and private HE provision is more complementary in response to the globalisation and marketisation of HE. The complementary role of public and private HE institutions meet societal, developmental and economic needs with regard to economic preparation and knowledge creation for future employability in South Africa (Kruss, 2005).

The landscape of public HE institutions may best be summed up in the following tables that demonstrate the number and nature of public HE in South Africa. There are three types of public universities in South Africa: traditional universities; comprehensive universities; and universities of technology (technikons), as listed in Tables 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3.

Table 2.1: List of Traditional universities in South Africa

| Traditional universities of South Africa |
|---|
| University of Cape Town |
| University of Fort Hare |
| University of the Free State |
| University of KwaZulu-Natal |
| University of Limpopo |
| University of Mpumalanga |
| North-West University |
| University of Pretoria |
| Rhodes University |
| Sol Plaatje University |
| University of Stellenbosch |
| University of the Western Cape |
| University of the Witwatersrand |

(source: acknowledgement of Bevin, 2018)

Table 2.2: List of Comprehensive universities in South Africa

| Comprehensive universities in South Africa |
|---|
| University of Johannesburg |
| Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University |
| University of South Africa |
| University of Venda |
| Walter Sisulu University |
| University of Zululand |

(source: acknowledgement of Bevin, 2018)

Table 2.3: List of Universities of technology in South Africa

| Universities of technology in South Africa |
|---|
| Cape Peninsula University of Technology |
| Central University of Technology |
| Durban University of Technology |
| Mangosuthu University of Technology |
| Tshwane University of Technology |
| Vaal University of Technology |

(source: acknowledgement of Bevin, 2018)

2.3. Private higher education

This section describes the PHE sector in South Africa. The growth of PHE is a global phenomenon in response to a growing demand for education worldwide. The demand for education in South Africa as part of its 'emerging economy' agenda fed into the global narrative for growth in PHE provision (Kinser, Levy, Silas, Bernasconi, Slantcheva-Durst, Otieno, Lane, Praphamontipong, Zumeta & LaSota, 2010). Private higher education institutions in South Africa came about because of shifting patterns of education provision in different periods and contexts within the developing economy. The growing economy saw a need for vocational training within the HE

landscape. Legislation lent legitimacy to institutes of private education provision. Over time, government intervention racialised and segregated patterns of education provision, which influenced funding and ownership of private education. Collaborative agreements between public and private, and sometimes international, providers of education provision were struck. The shifting demand of a South African populace hungry for economic advancement through education added to the growth in PHE provision. The responsiveness to their offerings was fuelled by the changing value of HE programmes and the changing demands of the workplace. Contact and distance education collaborative agreements between private and public HE institutions emerged as new models of delivery in HE (Kruss, 2005) in response to changing economic and vocational demands. It is through this model of delivery that the educational brand of a PHE provider in this current study emerged. The landscape of PHE institutions in South Africa may best be summed up in a sample of PHE providers in South Africa shown in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4: Sample list of private universities and colleges in South Africa

| Private universities and colleges in South Africa |
|---|
| AFDA (The South African School of Motion Picture Medium and Live Performance) |
| Cornerstone Institute |
| CTI Education Group |
| Damelin |
| IMM Graduate School of Marketing |
| Independent Institute of Education (IIE) |
| Inscape Design College |
| Management College of Southern Africa |
| Milpark Business School |
| Monash South Africa |
| Pearson Institute of Higher Education |
| Regenesys Business School |

(source: acknowledgement of Bevin, 2018)

As far back as 1996, there was a recognition that the privatisation of HE could possibly address the skills shortage in the labour market in a complementary role to public HE (Jansen *et al.*, 2007; Lane, 2012; Porter, 2010; Levy, 2015). According to Jansen *et al.* (2007), the complementary role of the PHE sector was necessary to address the human resource needs within a society that needed to be transformed to a democracy, and that also suited the imperatives of a globalised economy. Complementarity for Levy (2015) meant 'private higher education should provide enhanced post-secondary access and job relevance while not basically challenging public higher education'. Nxasana (2016) concurred that these graduates should have the skills to meet the current and future needs of the economy and society. The PHE sector was now able to offer degrees and diplomas to increase access through differentiation of academic programmes by a diversity of PHE providers. The changes in PHE, while meeting the developmental and economic needs of the country, impacted the management of private (and public) HE and the role (and workload) of the middle manager within those education institutions.

2.3.1. Regulation in private higher education

This section provides the legislative framework within which private higher education operates. The government provided a legislative framework to regulate the private provision of higher education through the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997, especially the relationship between public and private partnerships. The criteria for registration of PHE providers were that they (1) maintain acceptable and comparable standards, (2) complies with the requirements of the appropriate quality assurance body, and (3) complies with any other reasonable requirement determined by the Registrar of private higher education (Kruss, 2005). The inclusive definition of higher education in the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 and the South African Qualifications Framework (SAQA) of 1995 comprised all post-secondary vocational education. Accredited vocational-certificate and professional diploma-level qualifications of private colleges and professional institutes were now formally deemed equivalent to the higher education qualifications offered in public universities or technikons at the same National Quality Framework (NQF) level. According to Kruss (2005: 275), accreditation of PHE providers has given PHE providers legitimacy and status with

which to increase their market share and competitive advantage. Registration and accreditation put an end to the 'fly by night' establishment of PHE providers (Jansen *et al.*, 2007).

The laissez-faire attitude towards the PHE sector that existed from the DET changed from 1999 onwards to one of hostility as the PHE sector was now seen to be a competitor to public HE institutions (Jansen *et al.*, 2007). The Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2013) reveal that there are 124 PHE providers registered in the Department of Higher Education's Register of Private Higher Education providers, with an additional 96 provisionally registered PHE providers. The public higher education sector, on the other hand, has nearly a million students registered at South Africa's 20 public universities and 6 universities of technology (Govender, 2015).

2.3.2. Context of case study

This section describes the research context for this current study. An educational brand of a PHE provider is the research context. The PHE provider embarked on a deliberate strategy to enter the PHE sector by providing contact-tuition support for the University of South Africa (UNISA) distance-degree programmes. The PHE provider identified and responded to a gap in the market for PHE to offer degree programmes in partnership with a distance public HE institution. The vision of the PHE provider was to increase enrolment and success rates in a collaborative relationship with the public provider in the interests of the individual student, the PHE provider and the public distance HE institution.

The educational brand of a PHE provider of a JSE-listed company has eight campuses spread across South Africa. Each campus has four academic faculties, namely, Commerce, Applied Humanities, Information Technology and Education. The educational brand has a student population of about 2 000 and a full-time non-academic staff complement of 63. There are three vice-principals who report to the principal with their specialised area of oversight, namely, operations, marketing and academics. The research sample for the study comprise seven participants from the operations division. These participants fulfill the criteria for middle managers, as

explained in Chapter 1, at the research site and as explained in the research sample in Chapter 4 (refer section 4.8).

The research problem that the current study addresses is the reorientation of work practices in the operations division of the educational brand of the PHE which has led to increased pressure on the workloads of the middle managers. Middle managers are defined as performing an intermediate role between top-level management and first-level supervision and being responsible for the operational work of others (Thomas-Gregory, 2014) as mentioned in Chapter 1 (refer section 1.10.2) and in subsequent chapters. The contribution of this current study is that it focuses on middle managers from an administrative middle management perspective, while previous studies have focused on middle managers from an academic middle management perspective (Thomas-Gregory, 2014; Floyd, 2016).

2.4. Leadership in higher education

The focus of the theoretical lens in this current study has been diverted from top management to middle management. This current study seeks to connect the relational constitutionality of the micro-strategising practices of middle managers to the enabling and/or constraining organisational social structures within which strategy occurs (Giddens', 1984; Floyd, 2012: 279; Nicolini, 2012; Vaara & Whittington, 2012: 318; Feldman & Worline, 2016).

The restructuring and transformation of the HE sector in South Africa necessitated the creation of new institutions with new identities and structures (Jansen *et al.*, 2007). The restructuring of the HE system involved the merging, closing, and incorporation of institutions consisting of universities, technikons, teacher-training colleges, nursing colleges, and agricultural colleges into a reduced number of universities, universities of technology and comprehensive institutions (Jansen *et al.*, 2007). These newly formed institutions needed institutional management to involve staff members to integrate campuses around transformational leadership, participative management and management of diversity (Nolte, 2004).

Three leadership approaches to governing educational institutions emerged during the post-1994 period, namely, managerial leadership, transformational leadership, and crisis management (Cloete & Kulati, 2003). I will discuss managerial and transformational leadership below. The restructuring and transformation of the higher education sector heralded an ideological conception of management, namely, managerialism (Deem, 2004; Deem & Brehony, 2004). Managerialism is a concept which originated in corporate practices developed in the private sector and which was now being applied to the management and governance of HE institutions (Deem, 2004; Deem & Brehony, 2004; Nolte, 2004; Meek *et al.*, 2010). The worldwide movement that led to a new way of managing universities according to private sector management concepts (Meek *et al.*, 2010) was introduced to strengthen management practices during strategic change of HE in South Africa. The transformation in the HE landscape in South Africa needed new managerial skills and competencies to be acquired at top management level and operational middle management level. Corporate buzzwords like 'entrepreneurial, adaptive, responsive and service-oriented' along with 'performance measurement, customer orientation, outsourcing, benchmarking' became the order of the day in HE institutions worldwide, and in South Africa (Meek *et al.*, 2010: 32). The detractors to this new way of doing things argued that the autonomy of the HE institutions would be infringed.

Cloete and Kulati (2003) classify 'managerialism' into 'strategic managerialism' and 'unwavering entrepreneurialism' as sub-categories to institutional change within the HE landscape. Of relevance to this current study is the classification of 'unwavering entrepreneurialism'. For Cloete and Kulati (2003), an education institution is a business when it applies private-sector management procedures and techniques, offers goods and services at a competitive price, and has links with industry to produce employable graduates. These for-profit education institutions view the DET's regulatory frameworks (and audit processes) as necessary but inconvenient (Cloete & Kulati, 2003).

Changes in HE have affected the way in which institutions have viewed themselves, their missions and their degrees of freedom, with a concomitant erosion of institutional autonomy and growth in accountability (Deem, 2004; Jansen *et al.*, 2007; Meek *et al.*,

2010; Floyd, 2016). Government intervention in the autonomy of HE institutions has affected the relationship between the government and HE institutions regarding governance, management and administration of higher education institutions (Jansen et al, 2007; Floyd, 2016).

The seminal study by Deem (2000) on managerialism found that new academic managers in HE institutions received minimal training and that their daily organisational lives were consumed by long hours, copious meetings and large amounts of paperwork. The study by Floyd (2016) addressed the gap in the literature identified in that of Deem (2000) around leadership development for academic middle managers. The focus of this current study highlights a different contribution. The contribution of this current study is that it explores the micro-strategising practices of *administrative* middle managers at the educational brand of a PHE provider, while the studies of Deem (2000), Thomas-Gregory (2014) and Floyd (2016) focused on *academic* middle managers in public HE (refer Chapter 1 section 1.4.1).

A consequence of managerialism in the PHE landscape has been the erosion of traditional collegial traditions in profit-driven education institutions (Cloete & Kulati, 2003; Deem, 2004). 'Collegiality' is defined as the 'relationship among people within a profession, field, organisation, or office, and is characterised by trust, openness, concern, and co-operation' (Bergquist, 1992). As Deem (2001: 11) says, 'The effect this [managerialism] will have on organisational culture and morale is unlikely to be only positive' and would create distrust between management and staff as evidenced in this current study (refer Chapter 5 section 5.4.1 and 5.4.2). Of significance to this current study is that the changes in PHE have impacted the administrative middle manager and placed increased pressure on their administrative workloads, job vulnerability and general insecurity in a threatening work environment (refer Chapter 5 section 5.4.3 and 5.4.4). Hence, the research problem mentioned in Chapter 1 which this current study addresses. The purpose of this current study is to make the daily micro-strategising practices visible and of significance to the smooth running of the educational brand through the production of individualised reflections of meaning.

2.5. Relationality of private and public higher education

This section discusses the mutual relationality (Feldman & Worline, 2016) of PHE and public HE. The two HE landscapes should be seen as complementary to the provision of HE in South Africa in response to the global narrative of education complementarity (Kinser *et al.*, 2010), and not be seen as working in opposition to each other. The relationality of PHE providers and public HE providers should be seen as working towards furthering national HE and socio-economic goals - functioning in the interests of the 'social good' (Kruss, 2004: 5). The relationality of stability and change in HE enables shaping of the HE environment through a 'web of practices' (Vaara & Durand, 2012; Feldman & Worline, 2016). The external environment in which the two sectors operate has become increasingly complex and hostile, while universities have expanded in size and complexity. This dynamic environment, both internal and external, has necessitated a strategic response towards leadership and professional management of HE institutions (Meek *et al.*, 2010). This complementary relationship could potentially realise an emerging strategy (Mintzberg, 1990) for transformation of HE in South Africa, and for middle managers, in particular, in a changed organisational setting.

2.6. Chapter conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of HE in South Africa with particular emphasis on PHE provision as per the current case study. The chapter also provided the regulatory framework within which the public and private providers operate. The chapter also dealt with the leadership in HE and its transformational focus. A discussion on collegiality within the PHE space followed. Thereafter, a discussion on the relationality of public and private HE provision followed. The chapter framed HE within a mainframe paradigm of HE as the pipeline to knowledge, growth, employment and innovation. As such, it cited a particular set of scholars in order to make this argument. At the level of conclusion, it is noted that there are other lenses used, including various critical lenses, which may also fruitfully be provided to review the role of HE.

Chapter 3 will review the literature on strategy-as-practice and sense-making as it focuses on humanising management through the micro-strategising practices of agency and sense-making within an enabling and/or constraining organisational social structure after change implementation over time to situate the current study in the body of knowledge.

Chapter 3: Agency in strategy-as-practice and Weickian sense-making

I'll always remember how it made me feel to realise that when you write something and send it into the world it finds its way in an uncertain fashion, by invisible circuits and currents to unlikely receptors and creates small sparks of connections, like the firing of a synapse, between your mind and another.

– Darrel Bristow - Bovey

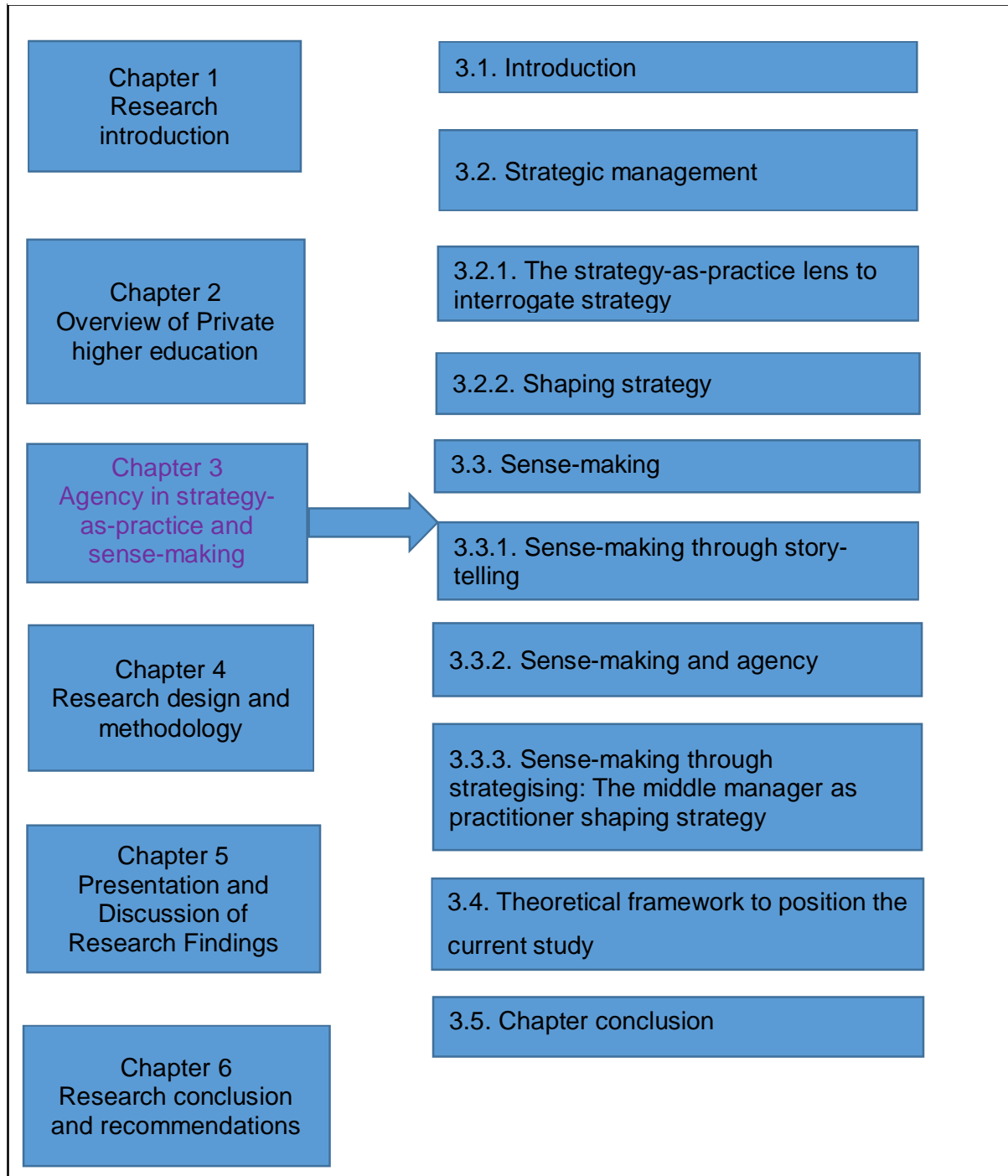
3.1. Introduction

This chapter serves to report on the review of the literature on agency from a strategy-as-practice perspective and sense-making from a Weickian perspective. Chapter 1 explained the focus of the current study. The main conceptual lenses are middle managers' agency and sense-making practice within an enabling and/or constraining organisational social structure after strategic change implementation, and whether these micro-practices have the ability to shape strategy. The imbued social and strategic web is a binding consideration.

Firstly, a theoretical background is provided by explaining how the strategy-as-practice is used in this current study as a lens to interrogate strategy to position the current study. The lens of this work is about how people engage with strategy as context- and people-specific and not as a strategic plan. Hence, strategy-as-practice is the selected focus. Following on the research problem, attention is turned to the concept of sense-making and story-telling. Thereafter, the literature demonstrates middle managers' engagements, in the light of main strategy practices (strategising; sense-making and story-telling) from a strategy-as-practice perspective and the mutual relationality of that role within an organisational social structure. The chapter concludes with a summary of the applied gap with theoretical dimensions explored in the current study.

Figure 3.1 shows Chapter 3 in relation to the research process.

Figure 3.1: Structure of Chapter 3



(source: own compilation, 2018)

Humanising management is becoming increasingly part of the strategy research agenda. The organisation has no physical reality but exists as a socially constructed reality in the minds of the people who inhabit the organisational social structure (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). People are at the centre of strategic activity as it is the people in the organisation who tend to shape the structure of the organisation. The organisational social structure confirms that managers, and in the case of this study, middle managers, exercise and apply their abilities, knowledge and skills to make sense of their daily lived experience within a changing environment (Whittington, 2007). It is through the ongoing, unfolding daily organisational practice of what middle managers do (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Rouleau, 2014) that organisations and strategy come into being. This is a view that Owens (2001) and Tsoukas and Chia (2002) shares. Strategy emerges through the actions of organisational actors (Whittington, 2006; Feldman & Worline, 2016).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical perspective cogently to review a slice of existing body of knowledge on how the agency and sense-making of the middle managers could shape strategy within the social structure of an enabling and/or constraining organisation. Considerations of time and space are included. I considered the depictions and rebuttals of the theoretical concepts of strategy-as-practice, middle managers, agency, sense-making and story-telling. It is to be noted that some references included in this current study, considered seminal studies, predate the expected five years (Williamson, 2013).

3.2. Strategic management

There has been a claimed theoretical dichotomy between strategy-as-practice and strategy process: strategy has been divided into 'content' approaches which concerns types of strategy; and 'process' approaches which focus on strategy formulation and strategy implementation (Whittington, 2007). Bourgeois (1980) identified a distinction between content and process in strategy research where strategy content research addresses 'what strategy' whereas strategy process research addresses the question of 'how' an organisational strategy emerges, as this study does. Recently, scholars

have reduced the distinctions between strategy content and strategy process research to form a new combined approach to strategy work and labeled this evolution as 'Strategy as Process and Practice' (SAPP) (Burgelman *et al.*, 2018).

Chia and Holt (2006) feel that the development of a process-based research approach as an alternative to 'content' strategy research has helped to humanise the field of strategic management. A strategy content approach does not capture the internal, actual goings-on in strategy formation, as opposed to a strategy process approach which does (Chia & Holt, 2006) - the do-ing of strategy in the strategy-as-practice perspective. Strategy-as-practice blends strategy formulation and strategy implementation where top managers, who are considered too distant from everyday strategic activities, formulate and direct strategy, while the 'do-ers', middle managers who are the closest to what is going on in the organisation, implement plans given to them (Vaara & Whittington, 2012: 311).

Middle managers, the people who do strategy, have an intermediate role between strategic and operational levels and, as such, link the activities of vertical and lateral groups (Mantere, 2008). This intermediate position gives them the potential to shape the organisation through the doing of strategy through their knowledgeability of the organisational context and their colleagues (Davis, 2013; Floyd, 2016) and allows them to influence those around them (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011: 953). This current study endeavours to link the micro-practices of agency and sense-making to the organisational social structure to humanise the field of strategic management (Kouamé & Langlely, 2015). There are still apertures within these theoretical points of departure that warrant further study.

3.2.1. The strategy-as-practice lens to interrogate strategy

Research using the strategy-as-practice perspective examines the internal, mundane everyday activities that lead to strategy formation: 'how managers actually do strategy' (Whittington, 1996). The focus is on micro-activities that constitute the 'doing' of strategy as strategy is viewed as a social phenomenon, as this current study does. Whittington (1996) concurs with Mintzberg (1978) that strategy emerges as a

consequence of spontaneous human activities alongside that of human design in strategy formation. Chia and Holt (2006) feel that Mintzberg's (1978) assertion that strategy is 'immanent in everyday practical coping' falls short in explaining how there is a patterned consistency of actions that they feel could be called a 'strategy'. Chia and Holt (2006), by drawing on Heidegger (1962), posit a conceptualisation of human agency, action and practice in relational terms rather than institutional terms to explain everyday purposive actions and practices in which strategy emerges non-deliberately. This current study remained aware of this lens. For Chia and Holt (2006), practices are not just what people do, but rather constitute identity-forming and strategy-setting activities.

In the light of the above, the social interaction of middle managers within an organisational social structure (Davis, 2013; Jansen van Rensburg *et al.*, 2014) and its constitutive relationship is what shapes sense-making around strategic outcomes in an effort towards stability (Owens, 2001; Weick *et al.*, 2005; Nicolini, 2012) and sustainability. Middle managers are often not considered as part of strategy-as-practice (Burgelman *et al.*, 2018), which also distinguishes the choice for strategy-as-practice. Diverse theoretical perspectives on strategy tend to explain social organisational behaviour in terms of the actions of individuals or groups of individuals independent of social practices.

More recently, with the world being a more inter-related, connected and open ecology, strategy research has drawn on various theoretical perspectives ranging from those of philosophers like Foucault (1980) to sociologists like Giddens (1984), anthropologists like Bourdieu (1990), ethno-methodologists like Garfinkel (1967), activity theorists like Vygotsky (1978), and discourse researchers like Fairclough (2003). This has created a much more levelling view of strategy – which is noted through everyday practice of insightful work towards achieving survival and innovation. This is therefore termed as a veritable 'practice turn' in the social sciences (Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012).

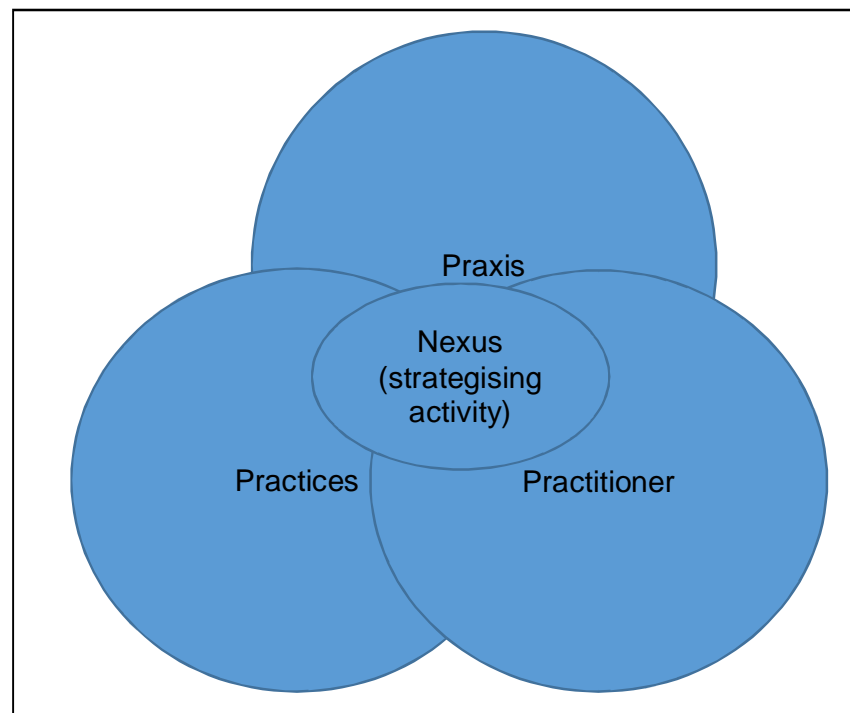
Strategy-as-practice theory, specifically, embeds individual organisational social behaviour within social organisational practices: praxis and practices are constitutive of each other. The human actor for the strategy-as-practice theorist is never a discrete

individual detached from the organisational social context (Vaara & Whittington, 2012: 288). S/he is a social being who is defined by the micro-level practices (Clegg, 2012; Nicolini, 2012) within which s/he is immersed through time and space (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). The theoretical perspective of strategy-as-practice in this current study looks at the recursive, interdependent relationship between praxis and practice (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012) as actioned by the practitioner's lived experience within the organisational social structure. How then do the practices and agency shape strategic outcomes? Nicolini (2012) says: 'practices are context-shaped and context-renewing'.

Strategy-as-practice theorists like Vaara and Whittington (2012: 289), Nicolini (2012) and Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2012) distinguish three types of practice approaches: empirical (studying the detailed processes and people of organisational life), theoretical (studying strategy from a social theoretical perspective), and philosophical (understanding that the social world consists of practices and not actors). The strategy-as-practice perspective in this current study draws from the sociological theoretical perspective to contribute a richer and broader perspective on the minutiae of everyday organisational life. Jarzabkowski, Kaplan, Seidl and Whittington (2016) conceptualise the strategy-as-practice perspective as 'a situated, socially accomplished activity, while strategising comprises those actions, interactions and negotiations of multiple actors and the situated practices that they draw upon in accomplishing that activity'. Strategy is thus not something an organisation has but something that its members do (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012; Clegg, 2012), or as Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009: 69) put it: 'strategy [is concerned with] who does it, what they do, how they do it, what they use, and what implications this has for shaping strategy'. For Owens (2001) in his structural perspective of educational organisations, people in the organisation who inhabit the organisational social structure tend to shape the structure of the organisation through what they 'do'. The organisation has no physical reality but exists as a socially constructed reality in the minds of its organisational members – 'they [through social webs] are made to work' (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Both practice theorists and organisational behaviour theorists tend to emphasise a duality and interdependence between praxis and practices executed by a practitioner.

The strategy-as-practice perspective is premised on a conceptual, integrative framework of the three research elements of strategy-as-practice. The seminal three elements are praxis (activity involved in strategy-making), practices (tools, norms, and procedures of strategy work) and practitioners (actors involved in strategy-making). Whittington (2007) also added a fourth element, profession, taken up more recently in Whittington, Yakis-Douglas, Ahn and Cailluet (2017). These three elements enable understanding of the discrete but inter-related nature of these elements as proffered by practice theorists like Vaara and Whittington (2012), Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2012), Jarzabkowski *et al.*, (2013), Suddaby, Seidl and Lê (2013), and Seidl and Whittington (2014). Strategising activity for practice theorists is the doing of strategy by a practitioner (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012; Clegg, 2012) within the social structure of an organisation and occurs at the nexus of these three research elements between practitioners and the practices that they draw on in order to shape the praxis of strategy (Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012), as Figure 3.2 shows.

Figure 3.2: Conceptual, integrative framework of the three research elements in strategy-as-practice



(source: acknowledgement of Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl (2007: 11))

Even though Williamson (2013: 43) concurs with the discrete yet inter-related nature of strategising activity, she cautions that strategy is not linear but 'inter-linked, iterative and cyclical'.

Strategy research, in its efforts to humanise management and organisation research (Chia & Holt, 2006), focuses on human actors (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012; Vaara & Whittington, 2012) and their actions and interactions within the organisational social structure. Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2012) concurs with Owens (2001) that people bring their own beliefs, goals, hopes and concerns to the contextual setting of their daily, lived organisational lives which helps in the shaping of strategy.

Areas that have been recommended for future research in Strategy as Process and Practice (SAPP) (Burgelman *et al.*, 2018) are: temporality; actors and agency; cognition and emotionality; materiality and tools, structure and systems; and language and meaning. This current study modestly contributes to the theoretical gap with its focus on middle managers (Mantere, 2008; Wooldridge, Schmid & Floyd, 2008), more specifically, administrative middle managers as practitioners, or agents, at an educational brand of a PHE provider. The current study focuses on the micro-strategising practices (agency and sense-making) of these middle managers over a four-month period to understand how they interpret and influence strategic outcomes, to add modestly to the body of knowledge regarding temporality (Kaplan & Orlikowski, 2013; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014). Cognition and emotionality has not been adequately explored in SAPP, except for studies on sense-making by Balogun and Johnson (2004), cognition by Kaplan (2011) and the affective communication practices by senior management by Balogun, Bartunek and Do (2015). A light contribution to the SAPP is the current study's awakening on cognition and emotionality to drive strategic outcomes around cognition, emotionality and strategic communication practices by middle management over time. This current study is also emblematic of the dual role played by organisational structures as a context for strategy work and as an accomplishment of strategy work (Whittington, Lê & LeBaron, 2016). The constitutive nature of the organisational structure is explored in this current study through enabling and/or constraining structural relations humanised through the exercise of power (Lukes, 2005).

The strategy-as-practice perspective in this current study is in opposition to the economic theory of strategy (Clegg, 2012) which focuses on top management and emphasises how organisations perform. Scholars like Ansoff *et al.* (1976) and Ansoff (1979, 1987); Grant (2003) and Clegg's (2012) theoretical position offers a more 'mainstream' economic rendering of strategy. Practice theorists focus on strategy as driven through the practice lens that enable human activity through socio-material means (Kaplan, 2011; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan 2015; Dameron, Lê & LeBaron, 2015) and open organisational means. Strategy-as-practice is therefore not without its detractors or its evolution. This current study responds to the theoretical gap of practitioners who do strategy within an enabling and/or constraining organisational social structure through agency and sense-making. For the sake of relationality, the socio-material aspect is not discussed, but is noted above as an important element of strategy-as-practice.

3.2.2. Shaping strategy

Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) maintained that there was a need to 'understand the link between macro organisational phenomena and micro-managerial practices within strategy-as-practice'. Vaara and Whittington (2012) called for strategy-as-practice to address agency within the 'broader context of macro-institutional nature of social practices'. This current study explores how strategy, as a socially accomplished activity, is shaped by the 'micro-managerial practices' (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Rouleau, 2005) of agency and sense-making of middle managers within the mutually constitutive relationality of an enabling or constraining organisational social structure ('macro-institutional nature of social practices' (Vaara & Whittington, 2012)) from a strategy-as-practice perspective.

Strategy-as-practice views strategy as a 'social practice' (Whittington, 1996) where practices are micro-level activities performed by individuals within organised contexts (Mantere, 2005). This view recognises the dependence of social structures upon agents and the dependence of agents upon social structures (Herepath, 2014). Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl (2007) contend that the sociological theory of

practice refocuses the conceptualisation of strategy from the organisation to activities that agents perform – consistent with Whittington (1996). Feldman and Worline (2016) and Vaara and Durand (2012) contend that practice theory emphasises practice and the human action involved in practice. Even though practice for them is embedded in a ‘web of practices’, for Vaara and Durand (2012) this translates into strategic agency being enabled or constrained (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007) through a mutually constituted relationality. For Feldman and Worline (2016) this translates into human embedded practice as the unit of analysis rather than an individual – consistent with Chia and MacKay (2007).

The structuration theory by social theorist Giddens (1984) distinguishes between practical and discursive consciousness (Richards, 2009). Practical consciousness is that which shapes individuals according to social structures (Suddaby *et al.*, 2013: 330; Seidl & Whittington, 2014: 4) and results in individuals behaving in a certain way. This is a point of view that Floyd had raised in 2012 (Floyd, 2012: 274) in his consideration of the personal and professional circumstances that lead academics to become middle managers in a higher education institution. The study by Floyd (2012: 274) applies the inter-related concepts of ‘socialisation’ and ‘identity’ in conjunction with the structuration theory of Giddens (1984) as an interpretive framework to understand the nexus between structure and agency in the development of an academic career for middle managers. This current study would apply a strategy-as-practice perspective in conjunction with Weickian sense-making in its exploration of how the agency and practice of middle managers could shape strategic outcomes within an enabling or constraining organisational social structure (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). This is an area for future research which was highlighted by Vaara and Whittington (2012: 310).

Discursive consciousness explains how individuals are reflexive in making sense of the world in which they live. Rouleau (2005) and Jansen Van Rensburg *et al.* (2014) support this view in their consideration of the middle manager as mediator who uses purposeful knowledge creation through sense-making and sense-giving of organisational information to manipulate intended strategy (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). Practical and discursive consciousness provides an enabling environment of reciprocity (Jarzabkowski, 2004) between structure and agency where structure and

agency is constitutive of each other (Floyd, 2012; Nicolini, 2012; Herepath, 2014). This concept is in keeping with the duality of structuration perspective of Giddens (1984) and the organisational structure of an educational provider of Owens (2001). Feldman and Worline (2016) argue that central to practice theorists understanding of individuals and systems or structures is the concept of 'relationality' which is the ability to shape one another through mutual constitution of each other. A view that is shared by Nicolini (2012), Clegg (2012) and Michel (2014). Feldman and Worline (2016) share Whittington's (2006) view that strategy emerges through the actions of organisational actors. Herepath (2014) offers a non-conflationary insight into the duality of structure and agency in strategy formation and strategising by focusing on why strategists do what they do in their daily praxis – which is the focus of this current study.

This current study responds to the gap in the literature that Vaara and Whittington identified in 2012. Vaara and Whittington (2012) felt that the strategy-as-practice perspective was uniquely positioned to link the social structure of the organisation with the micro-level practices of the agent (Giddens, 1984; Mantere, 2005; Miettinen, Samra-Fredericks & Yanow, 2009; Nicolini, 2012; Floyd, 2012; Suddaby *et al.*, 2013). They felt that this position of the agent and micro-strategising practices within the organisational social structure from a strategy-as-practice perspective warranted future research – hence the current study.

The current study explores the micro-practices of agency and sense-making to shape and influence strategic outcomes within an enabling and/or constraining organisational social structure after strategy implementation. For Mantere (2005) and Clegg, Carter and Kornberger (2011), an enabling organisational environment enhances the performance of strategy through power relations, while a constraining organisational environment reduces the performance of strategy because of lack of access to power relations (Lukes, 2005). The difference between enabling and constraining organisational environments is that an enabling environment encourages adaptability and reflexivity, while a constraining environment contributes to predictability of the status quo (Mantere, 2005; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Clegg *et al.*, 2011).

Bojé (2001) felt that the hierarchical organisational social structure was bureaucratic and left the employees feeling 'vulnerable, futile and impotent'. Dobson (2000) and

Szekeres (2004) shared this view as there seemed to be a disconnection between the narrative of top management and the daily, lived organisational social experience of the middle managers and their subordinates as implementers of strategy. The focus of the theoretical lens has been diverted to middle management from top management (Clegg *et al.*, 2011). While this is evident in the literature discussed thus far, many would still challenge the middle managers' role in the strategy practices or processes and affirm the centrality of top managers (Rouleau, 2014).

3.3. Sense-making

Rouleau and Balogun (2011: 955) and Rouleau (2014) define sense-making as a 'social process of meaning construction and reconstruction through which managers understand, interpret, and create sense for themselves and others of their changing organisational context'. Sense-making in organisations is a social process and has tended to be researched from a top management or a middle management perspective. Middle managers as mediators (Davis, 2013; Rouleau, 2005; 2014) operating between strategic and operational levels in the social structure of the organisation use their knowledge (Davis, 2013) of their colleagues and context within the social structure (Colville *et al.*, 2011) to craft and share messages and to enhance the meanings of those messages to shape organisational change. As Bojé reveals (1991: 109), middle managers are very selective in what they reveal and to whom (Weick *et al.*, 2005; Fenton & Langlely, 2011), which implies reflexivity through adaptive sense-making (Weick *et al.*, 2005; Rouleau, 2005; Clegg *et al.*, 2011) on their part. This also implies the power (Weick *et al.*, 2005; Colville *et al.*, 2011) that middle managers have to influence the shaping of organisational life because of their knowledge of the organisational social structure and their colleagues at different organisational levels (Davis, 2013; Floyd, 2016).

This current study follows a Weickian sense-making perspective (Weick *et al.*, 2005; Rouleau, 2005; Vaara & Whittington, 2012) in its exploration of how practitioners make sense of their daily, lived organisational experience. The position of Weick *et al.* (2005) is that social roles and relationships within social structures provide organisational security (Owens, 2001) especially in times of crisis, and that without this, confusion

would reign and sense-making would be difficult. Sense-making for Weick *et al.* (2005) starts with chaos (Weick *et al.*, 1993) and suggests a relationship between the social structure of an organisation and the practice of sense-making by actors within that organisation. Robichaud, Giroux and Taylor (2004: 617) compared an organisation to a 'lamination of conversations' where the social interaction of middle managers with colleagues both above and below them in the hierarchy of the organisational social structure (Davis, 2013; Jansen van Rensburg *et al.*, 2014) is what shapes sense-making around strategic outcomes. The organisational social structure emerges through the sense-making practices of the actors' daily organisational life in an effort towards stability (Owens, 2001; Weick *et al.*, 2005; Nicolini, 2012) in a constitutive relationship. Communication through story-telling is reflexive (Giddens, 1984) and retrospective (Weick *et al.*, 2005).

3.3.1. Sense-making through story-telling

McDonald (2016) holds the view that employee story-telling within organisations communicate authenticity and credibility, because 'if companies are collections of people working for a common purpose, then telling stories of the people is telling the story of the company'. This is very much in keeping with the 'storytelling organisation' of Bojé (1991) and the view of Fenton and Langley (2011: 1175) that 'human being's (are) story-telling animals that make sense of their world (and their own lives) through narrative understanding'.

This current study adopts the strategy-as-practice perspective to link the micro-practice of strategy implementation to the macro-organisational social structure (Brown & Thompson, 2013: 1143) through the agency of the human actor to reveal the doing of strategy. This study focuses on stories told by individual middle managers to make sense of daily organisational social life as opposed to stories by senior management as espoused by Denning (2004, 2006) and Girard and Lambert (2007). Denning (2004, 2006) used a variety of narrative patterns through story-telling as a leadership tool to inspire and guide people through strategic challenges to achieve management goals. Girard and Lambert (2007) concur with Denning (2004, 2006) that

story-telling can be a catalyst for organisational change, but suggest that ‘well-written stories could also provide an alternative to face-to-face oral narrative’.

Stories, whether they are oral or written, come from senior or middle management, make sense and give sense to the flux that is organisational life (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Weick *et al.*, 2005; Colville *et al.*, 2011; Rouleau, 2014). Middle managers, as the practitioners in this current study, have used story-telling to make sense of the uncertainty and ambiguity of organisational change through shared meaning creation in daily organisational life (Balogun & Johnson, 2004 2005). Without sense-making, organisational members could become lost and the organisational social structure could descend into chaos and confusion (Colville *et al.*, 2011) – an idea similar to Weick *et al.* (2005). Understanding changes and assigning meaning to changes (Weick *et al.*, 2005) through interpretation is an evolving process as narrative is a way to cognitively process social information and make sense of organisational life (Rouleau, 2014; Dailey & Browning, 2014).

Narrative, through the practice of sense-making (Rouleau, 2014), could shape organisational change (Fenton & Langley, 2011) through collective individual storytelling of daily, lived organisational life (Fenton & Langley, 2011). The articulation of narrative to create shared understanding of organisational change (Barry & Elmes, 1997) implies agency from the middle manager (Weick *et al.*, 2005) as they move from tacit knowledge (Clegg, 2012; Dailey & Browning, 2014) to explicit knowledge in their attempt to influence and shape change: ‘actors are seen as purposefully engaged in the world, contributing to and influencing the final outcomes’ (Dunford & Jones, 2000: 1208 – 1209; Colville *et al.*, 2011: 9). This situation is made possible by the organisational security that the social structure gives the middle managers (Owens, 2001; Weick *et al.*, 2005; Nicolini, 2012; Dailey & Browning, 2014). Organisation means ‘community of practice ... with intersecting networks of conversations’ to Robichaud, Giroux and Taylor (2004: 617, 630) - the conversations of the individual actor ground the individual actor as a member employed within the academic operations division of the organisation (the educational brand of the PHE provider) while simultaneously being part of the broader conversation in and of the organisation. This view is similar to the dual quality of structuration of Giddens (1984) and the mutually constituted relationality of Feldman and Worline (2016).

Assigning meaning to interpret information is a purposeful action and implies reflexivity and knowledge by the middle managers as agents of change. The choice of story-telling as research design is not without its flaws. Barry and Elmes (1997) cautioned against the fictional nature of narrative in recounting strategy. Multiple individuals are able to give multiple meanings to their interpretation of what constitutes strategy (Fenton & Langley, 2011) and shapes strategy because of the subjective nature of story-telling. This view is similar to the 'polyphonic world' of meta-conversation within an organisation that Robichaud, Giroux and Taylor (2007: 617) speaks about. Suddaby *et al.* (2013: 335) identifies a new avenue of research in the study of micro-practices in meaning generation – 'sense-making and emotion'. For Suddaby *et al.* (2013: 335), 'sense-making and emotion' could have implications for shaping strategy through agency in the future. The implication for strategy-as-practice is that the emotion-sense-making relationship motivates individuals to act based on their interpretation of the situation (Maitlis, Vogus & Lawrence, 2013). This view is similar to those of Bate in 2004 and Weick *et al.* in 2005.

3.3.2. Sense-making and agency

For Whittington (1996), the practice perspective on strategy shifted interest in strategy research from the core competence of the organisation to the practical competence of the managers and how they 'do' strategy at the managerial level. The shift increasingly recognised the role of middle managers in strategy-making as opposed to top managers, a recognition of 'the practices by which work is actually done' by people inside organisational processes (Whittington, 2003), as this current study does. Chia and Holt (2006) concur and view strategy research from a 'dwelt-in' organisational reality where strategy and identity are constitutive of each other and developed through everyday practical coping (Chia & Holt, 2006; Segal, 2010) to give consistency and stability to the agent.

Sandberg and Tsoukas (2011) identify two temporary breakdowns, namely first-order breakdowns which emerge in organisational practices while second-order breakdowns are created by the researcher through research design. When an organisational

breakdown such as the reorientation of work practices occurs, as the case study in this current research study explores, the organisational identity of the agent is disturbed. The agent wishes to restore his/her organisational identity and consistency through purposeful everyday practices to make sense of his/her organised world. Heidegger (1962) maintains that in moments of organisational disruption (Weick *et al.*, 2005), like the reorientation of work practices, agents confront their way of being or practice, or their 'practical coping' (Chia & Holt, 2006; Segal, 2010). Middle managers as agents within the organisational social structure frame and reframe their daily organisational experience into reflective awareness - sense-making through story telling. Sandberg and Tsoukas (2011) concur and maintain that through research design, in this current case study through nano narratives (Williamson, 2013) in text messages and e-mail journals, the researcher creates a temporary breakdown by interrupting the flow of managerial practice. Agents are able to step back from what they routinely do to critically reflect on themselves and their practices to potentially reveal their logic of practice. Practice then becomes reflexive for the agent through sense-making.

Agency involves purposive actions by middle managers capable of reflecting on the conditions of their micro-level activities, and of transforming those conditions (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). The dualism between structure and agency are inter-related (Floyd, 2012; Nicolini, 2012) because of the reciprocal nature between the enabling and constraining organisational social structure and the knowledgeable and reflexive action of the actor (Davis, 2013) within the organisational social structure to influence change (Seidl & Whittington, 2014; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Suddaby *et al.* (2013) proffer an alternative view of actors and agency within the social structure of an organisation in their synthesis of neo-institutional and strategy-as-practice perspectives where actors have a limited degree of reflexivity within the social structure that they have constructed and a relative capacity to shape organisational change. Practice theorists like Floyd (2012), Davis (2013), Davis *et al.* (2014) and Jansen Van Rensburg *et al.* (2014) are supported by social theorists like Giddens (1984) in their assertion that humans have the ability to change situations through their agency because of their reflexive ability to think about their situations. The practices of agents within the organisational social structure are what make strategy happen as

people do strategy (Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012; Davis, 2013).

Cornelissen, Holt and Zundel (2011: 1701 - 1702) define strategic change as a 'redefinition of the organisation's mission and purpose or a substantial shift in overall priorities and goals' which has to be framed and communicated to stakeholders (Barry & Elmes, 1997) to gain their buy-in of acceptance and support. Vaara and Whittington (2012) caution against the influential nature of narrative in the sense-making of strategy. The study by Davis (2013) found that middle managers complied with more than bought into strategic change as a means of coping with organisational demands. Bate (2004), in his study of a change intervention in a UK hospital, was disheartened that the change literature did not reflect a connection between organisational change challenges and the emotional dimension of change. His study (2004) illuminates that emotional reframing of change was as important as cognitive reframing of change (Suddaby *et al.*, 2013) – an area that he felt warranted future research. This current study explores sense-making and how the micro-practice could shape strategy within an organisational social structure.

This current study endeavours to explore the sense-making of change as practitioners make sense of their daily, lived organisational experience within an organisational social structure, with the potential to explore the emotional reframing of change.

3.3.3. Sense-making through strategising: The middle manager as practitioner shaping strategy

Strategy as a social practice is an organised human activity that is socially embedded to uncover 'the neglected, the unexpected and the unintended' (Whittington, 2007). The focus of practice theory on the phenomena of social life is to 'understand organisation as it happens' and to examine what 'humans actually do when managing' (Miettinen *et al.*, 2009; Splitter & Seidl, 2011). Miettinen *et al.* (2009) point out that social practice theory is not a unified theory but a collection of theories by scholars interested in studying or theorising about practice, each with his or her own distinctive vocabulary – a 'plurality of meanings of practice' or a 'practice turn' according to

Whittington (2006), Gherardi (2009) and Vaara and Whittington (2012). The language of social science looks at three levels, namely, the micro (what people say and do), the meso (routines), and the macro (institutions) (Miettinen *et al.*, 2009). This current study explores the micro-level activities of middle managers at an educational brand of a PHE provider from a strategy-as-practice perspective.

As stated earlier, the strategy-as-practice perspective focuses on practitioners as social beings within an organisational social structure and their practices within the organisational social structure as a contextual setting in terms of how they work and what they are able to achieve. From a practice perspective, strategy research has previously focused on individuals from a top management perspective (Ronda-Pupo & Guerras-Martin, 2011) as the formulators of strategy. Vaara and Whittington (2012), in their review of research in strategy-as-practice, intimate that the focus in strategy research has now shifted to include middle managers as practitioners and implementers of strategy.

The strategy-as-practice perspective focuses on something that an organisation and the people in it do to accomplish strategy. Practice theorists like Davis (2013), Rouleau (2014), Jansen Van Rensburg *et al.* (2014) and Thomas-Gregory (2014) define middle managers as having a hierarchical position below top management and above the lower level of employees, being formally in charge of others, and having knowledge of the organisation within the social structure of the organisation. Middle managers, the people who do strategy, have an intermediate role between strategic and operational levels and, as such, link the activities of vertical and lateral groups. Their intermediate position in the organisational social structure enables them to have managers reporting to them while they, in turn, report to managers at a more senior level. This intermediate position allows them to have access to top management and to knowledge of the organisation (Thomas-Gregory, 2014; Floyd, 2016). Their knowledgeability of the organisational context and their colleagues (Davis, 2013; Thomas-Gregory (2014) allows them to influence those around them (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011) to adopt their point of view and have the potential to shape the organisation through the doing of strategy.

Top-down approaches to strategy research (Rouleau, 2014) emphasise reified notions of an 'organisation' and 'strategy'. Vargha (2011) rebuts this view in a review of a book that emphasised a call to explore the 'micro-foundations of institutional theory' from a practice perspective. Vargha (2011) revealed that it is through the ongoing, unfolding daily organisational practice of what middle managers do (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Rouleau, 2014) that organisations and strategy come into being. Owens (2001) and Tsoukas and Chia (2002) share this view. Owens (2001), in his exposition of role theory, sees the individual as one with needs, drives, emotions, and capabilities who occupies a role within the social structure of the organisation. The individual is able to shape the role from an individual perspective through interpretation of what that role means, but is also shaped by the role from an organisational perspective through social interaction with colleagues – a dual quality of interdependence (Nicolini, 2012).

The role of the middle manager from a practice perspective delves deeper into what middle managers actually do in the practice of strategy within an organisational social structure (Clegg, 2012; Rouleau, 2014). The middle manager wears many hats to perform the various roles required of the position on a daily basis. The role of middle managers from a strategy-as-practice perspective is one of creator, interpreter, seller and communicator of strategy (Vaara & Whittington, 2012) and of implementer of strategy, interpreter and communicator of information, facilitator of adaptability, and supporter and influencer of downward and upward communication (Davis, 2013; Jansen Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2014). Both public and private HE providers have had to adapt to a dynamic HE landscape which have impacted on the role and identities of internal academic operational middle managers (Thomas-Gregory, 2014; Floyd, 2016). The study by Davis (2013) outlines the organisational structure of a public HE provider within which the middle manager operates where the organisational structure gives the staff a sense of security by providing an enabling and constraining environment within which they conduct their daily activities. The organisational social structure of an educational brand at the PHE provider in this study enables the operational middle managers to exercise and apply their abilities, skills and experience to assume agency within their work spaces. Although, reorientation in working practices have required the middle managers to work across functional boundaries which have dis-enabled their daily organisational lives. It is within this context that

middle managers assume agency to make sense of their daily lived organisational experience to shape strategy and their organisational social environment enables and/or constrains their daily lived experience. While the studies of Deem (2000), Thomas-Gregory (2014) and Floyd (2016) focus on middle managers from an academic perspective in public HE, this current study focuses on middle managers from an administrative perspective in an educational brand from a PHE perspective.

Recent scholarly works by Davis (2013) and Floyd (2016) maintain that middle managers are considered to be the backbone of academic activity in higher education organisational institutions. Clegg and McAuley (2005) and Floyd (2012; 2016) present a multi-faceted analysis of middle management in HE in their contribution to the discussion around the concept of what constitutes middle management in higher education institutions. Discussion about management in HE literature has been around the twin discourses of managerialism and collegiality where middle managers have to deal with their colleagues on the one hand and the demands of senior executives on the other (Clegg & McAuley, 2005; Floyd, 2016). The study by Davis *et al.* (2014) focuses on the impact of managerialism on the strategy work of university middle managers, while Floyd's (2016) study focused on the role of the academic middle manager in HE. The studies by Szekeres (2004) and Bhayat (2012) illustrate how administrative staff is seen as an invisible group within the structure of the HE provider: 'the silence ...about the role of administrative staff ... is deafening'. A view which is shared by Dobson (2000) as an expression of exclusion as opposed to inclusion in the staff of the HE provider.

The study on organisational change by Bate (2004: 27) gives an account of how people are able to reframe their stories and build a springboard for the future through shared identity and purpose. Davis (2013) and Davis *et al.* (2014) have a similar concept where middle managers create systems to cope with organisational demands for themselves and their peers. Denning (2004, 2006) has a similar concept in his springboard stories where listeners co-create the strategic shift by listening to stories and creating their own individual stories.

3.4. Theoretical framework to position the current study

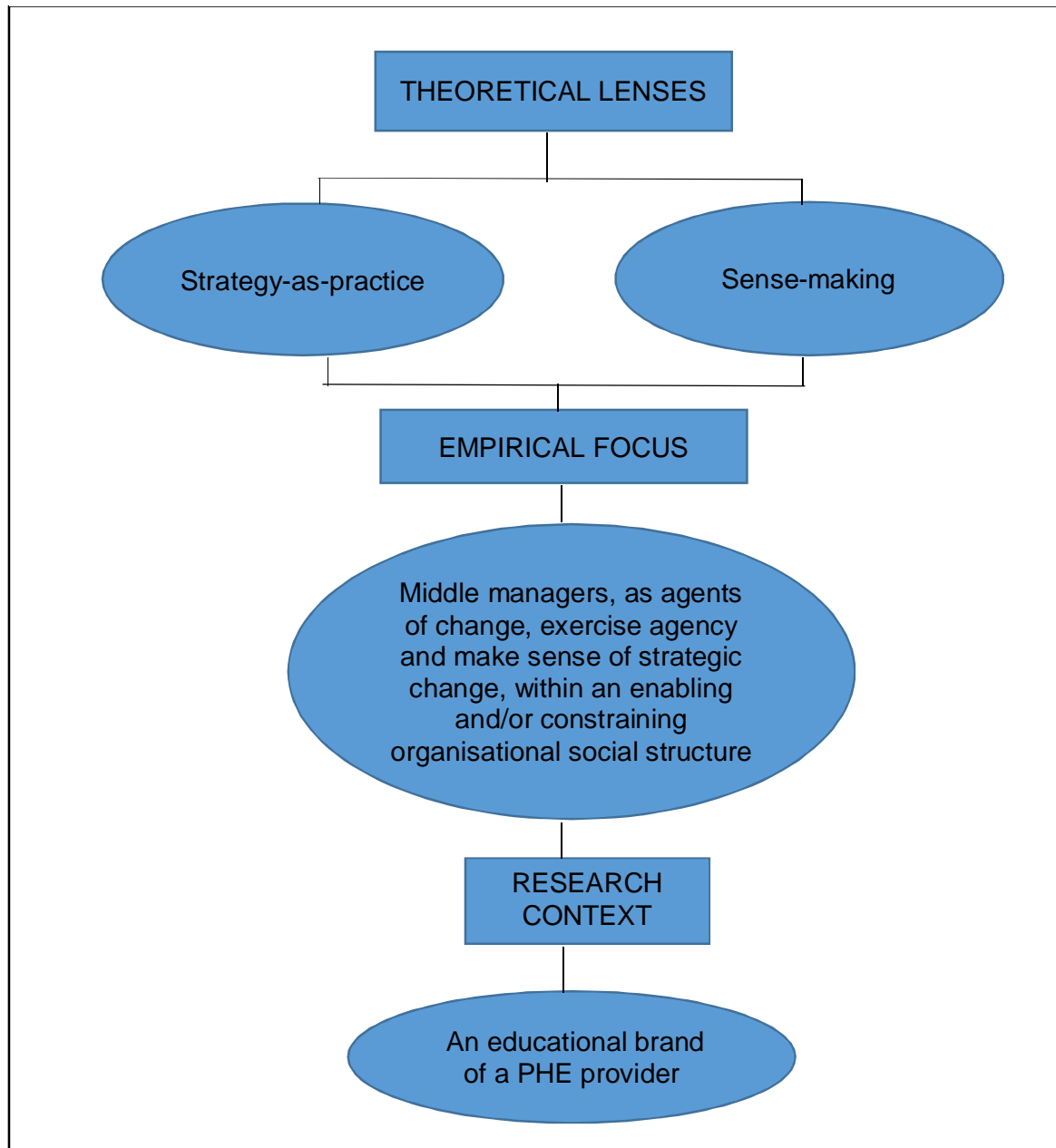
The strategy-as-practice perspective is used as a theoretical lens to explore the micro-level practices of middle managers' sense-making and agency. This current study focuses empirically on how strategy is made sense of by the middle managers in the context of the operations division of an educational brand of a PHE provider where they are employed (refer Chapter 2). This sense-making practice could shape strategic outcomes within an enabling and/or constraining organisational social structure through the agency of middle managers.

This current study follows a Weickian sense-making perspective (Weick *et al.*, 2005; Vaara & Whittington, 2012), which suggests a relationship between the social structure of an organisation and the practice of sense-making by actors within that organisation. Weick *et al.*'s (2005) argument is that social roles and relationships within social structures provide organisational security (Owens, 2001) as they are constitutive of each other (Nicolini, 2012; Clegg, 2012), especially in times of crisis. Without the interdependence of social roles and social structure, confusion would reign and sense-making would be difficult.

The theoretical concepts of strategy-as-practice and sense-making, which this current research study affirms, adopts an enabling framework for the middle managers as agents to make sense of their daily lived organisational lives.

Figure 3.3 visually conceptualises the theoretical dimensions to position the current study.

Figure 3.3: Visual depiction of theoretical dimensions of the current study



(source: own compilation, 2018)

The purposeful choice of strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012) and Weickian sense-making (Weick *et al.*, 2005) as core theoretical lenses consider the implications of strategy from a human perspective. These theoretical lenses consider

that social roles and relationships within organisational social structures provide organisational security (Owens, 2001) as they are constitutive of each other (Nicolini, 2012; Clegg, 2012). The relational nature of the micro-practices of the middle managers within an organisational social structure are enabled and/or constrained by the said structure, which is at the meta level of strategy (Mantere, 2005), to shape strategic change and outcomes, as shown in Table 3.1. Table 3.1 shows the applied gap with theoretical dimensions explored in the current study.

Table 3.1: Applied gap with theoretical dimensions, explored in the current study

| |
|--|
| Applied gap |
| the current study attempts to heed the call for strategy-as-practice to extend the extant work in terms of how the organisational social structure (meta) may be linked with the micro-practices of practitioners who do strategy |
| the current study's contribution in heeding this call: to explore how strategy is shaped by the micro-practices of agency and sense-making of the practitioner within an enabling and/or constraining organisational social structure, which is at the meta level of strategy |

(source: own compilation, 2018)

The contribution of this current study is to explore how strategy is shaped by the micro-practices of the practitioner within an enabling and/or constraining organisational social structure (meta) after strategic change implementation.

3.5. Chapter conclusion

The current study is positioned within the body of knowledge on strategy-as-practice with a focus on how middle managers, as sentient beings and do-ers of strategy, assume agency and sense-making within an organisational social structure to interpret and shape strategic outcomes during times of practice reorientation at an educational brand of a PHE (refer Figure 2.3). The current study responds to the call for more research focusing on how (and why) strategic changes have affected operational middle management. Their interpretations of strategic changes could potentially reveal

much about 'what lies beneath' daily, lived organisational experience in the implementation of strategy. Specifically, as stated in Chapter 1, the current study deals with the problem of the reorientation in working practices in the operations division of an educational brand at a PHE provider which has required middle managers to work across functional boundaries, which has impacted their daily work practice. The working environment in the operations division of the PHE brand has become strained and pressured as working across functional boundaries has been necessitated by resignations and shuffling of positions to make do with less staff members bringing about a reorientation of working practices in an educational environment that is highly competitive but needs to demonstrate stability and sustainability.

This current study focuses on the theoretical areas of agency from the strategy-as-practice perspective and Weickian sense-making to humanise management as it explores the daily, lived doing of strategy by practitioners to shape strategy over time. This current study explores the theoretical area of the mutually constitutive relationality of the micro-practice of strategy implementation to the enabling and/or constraining organisational social structure. The current study also endeavours to explore whether sense-making through story-telling by practitioners could shape strategy.

The purposive choice of story-telling in Chapter 4, the research methodology chapter that follows, would uncover the 'how' and the 'why' of the micro-strategising practices of practitioners through the research design of computer-mediated communication to reveal responses to the research questions.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

The pages inside are blank and crisp; anything at all can still be written there. When I look at them I feel a real tingle of excitement and something like wonder.

– Darrel Bristow - Bovey

4.1. Introduction

The literature review chapter provided the theoretical landscape which enabled the points of departure of the current study. The review attested to the largely scholarly concerns and contestations, within strategy, while also narrowing the argument to the chosen theoretical perspectives of strategy-as-practice and sense-making. The review demonstrated that the chosen theoretical positioning is congruent with the chosen research questions and the delineated knowledge gap.

Following on the review, I describe the plan of the current study, offering a feasible methodology that is also coherent with the research question and the qualitative assumptions of this current study. This also covers how the insights of Babbie (2007) have guided the research process for the current study. The current study is situated in the interpretivism paradigm through the additional lens of social constructionism. Social constructionism theorises meaning and experience within organisational socio-cultural contexts that enable individual story-telling (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As the researcher, I also offer a description of the data gathering methods employed, the research site and the selection of the participants. Data gathering and analysis, which includes coding of content, are also described. I also discuss the criteria applied for evaluating the quality of the research and the consideration of research ethics and scope and delimitations.

The shaping of strategic outcomes by middle managers suggests agency within the enabling and/or constraining structure of an organisation and sense-making practice within that organisational social structure. The research objectives of this current study endeavoured to uncover how that shaping was influenced by formulating the following objectives. I gave the research objectives identifiable, alphabetical markers:

B: To explore how the agency of middle managers shape strategic outcomes within an organisational social structure during and after strategic change implementation

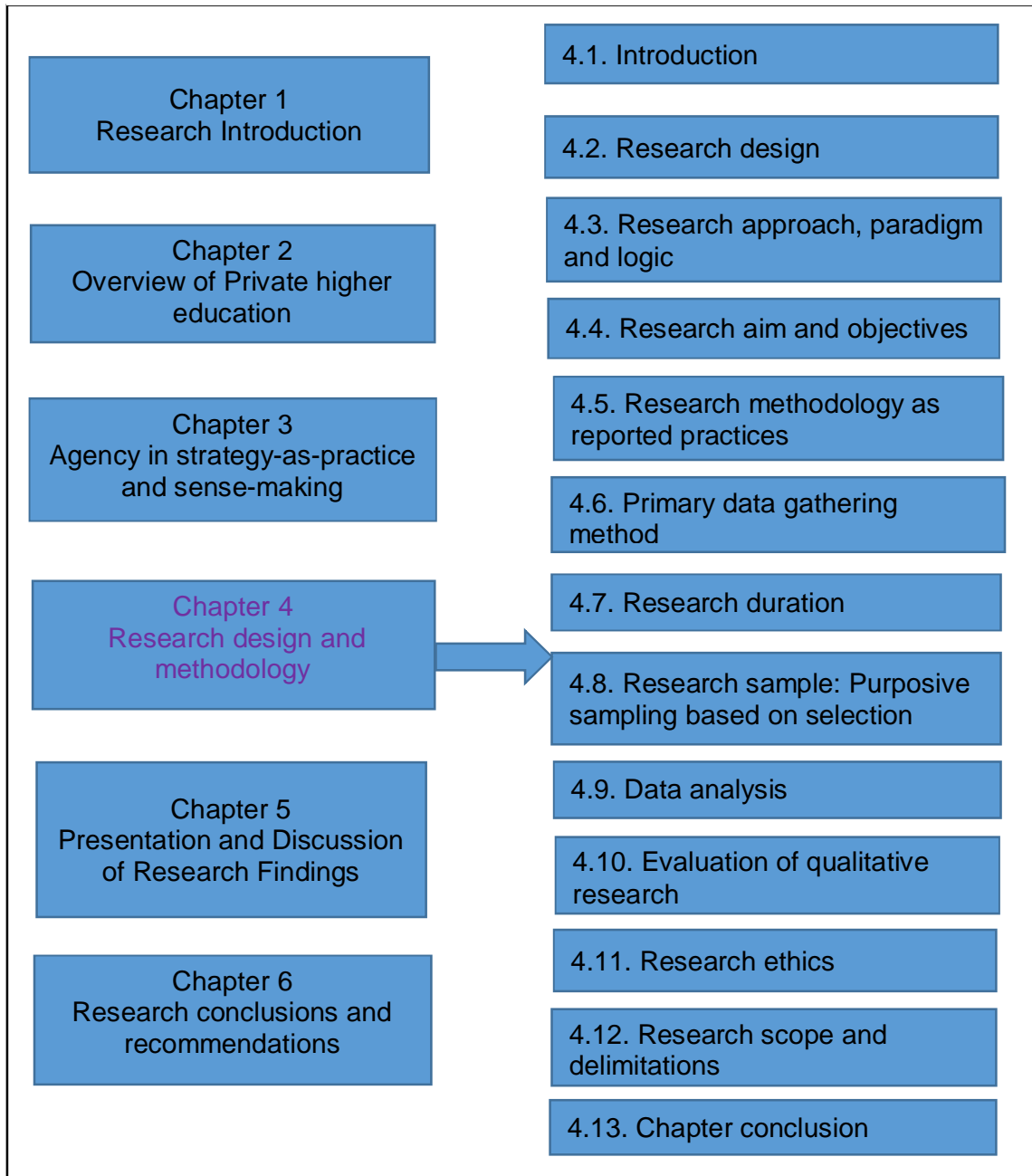
B1: To explore how the middle managers make sense of and shape strategic intent within an organisational social structure during and after strategic change implementation

B2: To explore how the organisational social structure provides an enabling and/or constraining environment for the agency and sense-making of middle managers within an organisational social structure during and after strategic change implementation

I have aligned the research questions and research objectives in Chapter 4 Table 4.1.

Figure 4.1 shows Chapter 4 in relation to the research process.

Figure 4.1: Structure of Chapter 4



(source: own compilation, 2018)

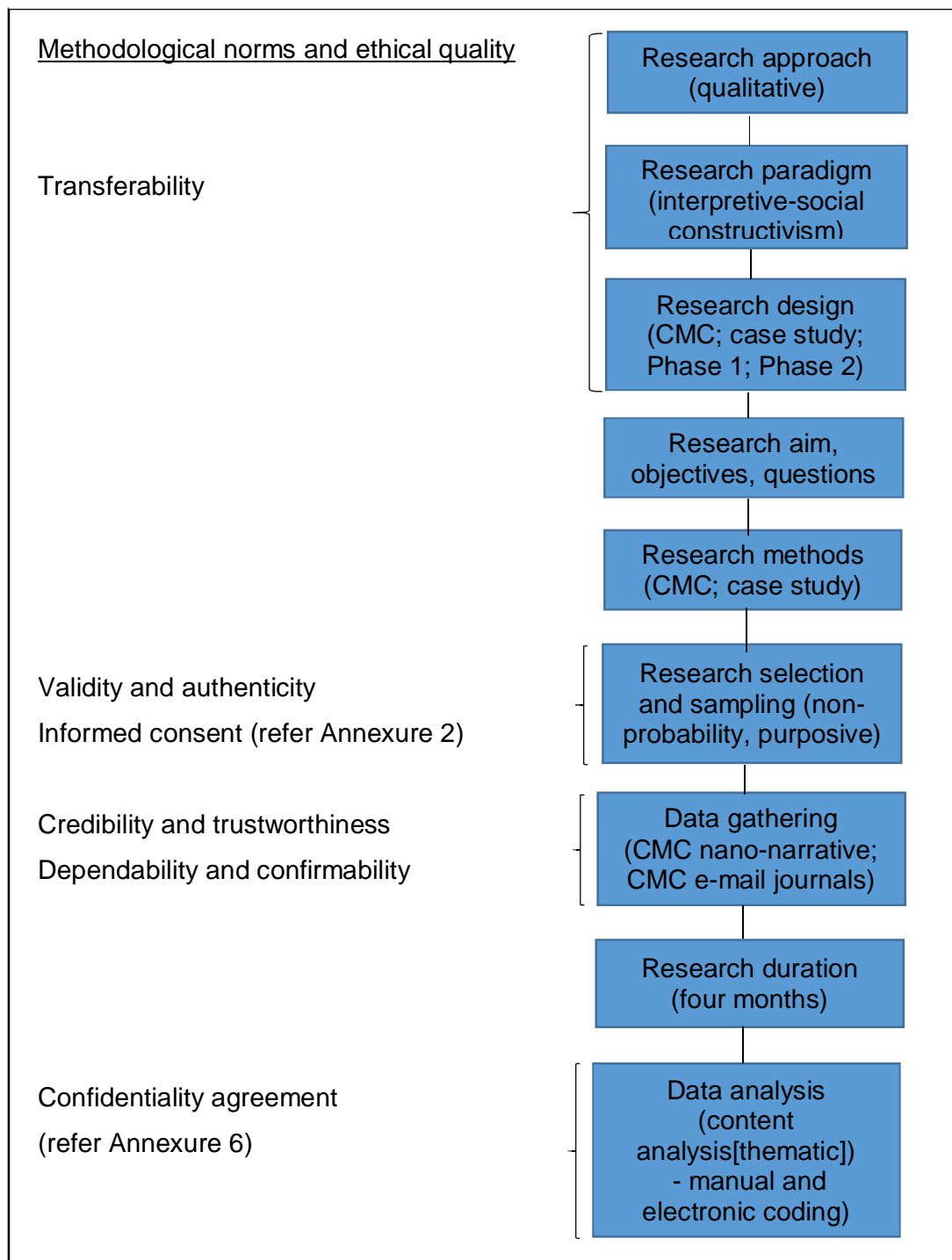
4.2. Research design

The research design of social scientific inquiry is to specify what the research problem is and then to determine the best way to do it. Social research has many purposes. Three of the most common purposes are: exploration, description and explanation

(Babbie, 2007). Exploratory research occurs when a researcher examines a new interest or when the subject of study is relatively new. In descriptive research, the researcher observes and describes what is observed in response to questions of what, where, when, and how. The purpose of explanatory research is to explain things in response to 'why' questions.

This study therefore sets out the exploratory, lived, organisational social reality of middle managers through their personal reflection, especially on change, over time. The purpose of this current study was to explore how the shaping of strategic outcomes by middle managers suggested agency and sense-making within an enabling and/or constraining organisational social structure after strategic change implementation. The research process of this current study is outlined below in Figure 4.2 to present a conceptual dimension of how the social scientific inquiry was executed.

Figure 4.2: The research process of the current study



(source: own composition, 2018)

The section that follows presents high-level areas of research decisions which are outlined in the conceptual overview of the research process in Figure 4.2 above.

4.3. Research approach, paradigm and logic

Social science endeavours to make sense of things, especially in daily life. Paradigms are frames of reference which are used to organise observations and reasoning. This current social study deals with micro-theory as opposed to macro-theory (Babbie, 2007). Micro-theory concerns issues of social life at the level of individuals and small groups. Macro-theory deals with large, aggregate entities of society or whole societies.

4.3.1. Research approach: Qualitative research

In designing the current research study, I had to determine how I was going to obtain the information needed to explore the lived organisational reality of the individuals. I chose the qualitative research approach. Quantitative research is concerned with the degree in which phenomena possess certain properties, states and characters, and the similarities, differences and causal relationships that exist within and between these. Qualitative research, on the other hand, is concerned with the nature of phenomena. As it is not measured in terms of quantity, amount or frequency, qualitative research is viewed, by some, as being 'airy fairy' or 'not real' research (Labuschagne, 2003: 100). This gave rise to debates encapsulated in the so-called 'paradigm wars' which have revealed the false dichotomy of judging research as such (Walsh, 2011).

Qualitative research, in this current study, involves studying the 'meaning of people's lives under real-world conditions' (Yin, 2010: 7) to gain insights into existing or emerging theories that could explain human social behaviour within organisational social contexts. The current study's focus on micro-theory is more in line with Schreier's (2012) definition of qualitative research. Schreier (2012) defines qualitative research as 'interpretation... the process of understanding, of attributing meaning'. Her definition supports the strategy-as-practice perspective which studies the micro social dimensions of practice in strategy (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012). The explorative nature of the current study adheres to the conditions for qualitative research as the study of natural social life (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Saldaña, 2013).

4.3.2. Research paradigm: Interpretivism and social constructivism

The current study is situated in the qualitative paradigms of human, social construction and interpretivism. I explored individual meaning-construction in organisational social reality around change over time through the micro-strategising practices of agency and sense-making. Interpretivism is about capturing the 'human experience within the organisation' and not about improving productivity or management control (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Graebner, Martin & Roundy, 2012; Neher, 1997: 27). Neher (1997) distinguishes between two types of interpretive research studies, namely, naturalist research, where the researcher observes natural events in an organisation without intervening, and organisational narratives, where practitioners use stories to make sense of and give meaning to organisational experiences. The current study took the latter position. I was concerned with understanding the experiences of practitioners and the interpretation they placed on those experiences through storytelling. I employed a qualitative, interpretive research design to capture and interpret first-hand accounts of individuals' lived experiences and interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Graebner *et al.*, 2012).

4.3.3. Research logic: Inductive and deductive

I used inductive and deductive content analysis in this current, qualitative, interpretive study (refer sections 4.9.1.1 and 4.9.1.2). Inductive discovery of meaning in qualitative data analysis is what is 'explored and inferred to be transferable from the particular to the general' (Marshall, 1996). Deductive discovery, on the other hand, used mainly in quantitative research, moves from the general to the specific and entails a rearrangement of premises and not fresh insights (Marshall, 1996; Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Saldaña: 2011). Inductive content analysis, in this current study, included open coding and axial coding through first- and second-order analysis respectively. Deductive content analysis was used to corroborate or build on existing theory (Graebner *et al.*, 2012) of strategy-as-practice and sense-making (refer Chapter 3). Graebner *et al.* (2012) advocate a blended analytical approach, therefore the current

study presents a synthesised, integrated approach to inter-coder data analysis (refer section 4.9.3).

The following section presents the operational level of research methodology, which is the outline at the 'doing' level of the conceptual research process.

4.3.4. Research design

A research design is used to guide a research study towards its objectives. I used a case study and emergent CMC technology in the discussion that follows.

4.3.4.1. Case study

Stake (1995) defines a 'case study' as 'a choice of object to be studied'. Stake (1995) distinguishes between three types of case study, namely, an intrinsic case study which is undertaken to understand a particular case better, an instrumental case study which is examined to provide insight into an issue, or a collective case study to inquire into the phenomenon, population or general condition of several cases. I chose to use an intrinsic case study to explore the stories which were bounded in this case. As this is an outline introduction, I provide more detail about how the shape of the case presented itself to me when I describe the actual primary data gathering method in section 4.6.

4.3.4.2. Computer-mediated and/or mobile communication (CMC) technology

I used emergent computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Salmons, 2016) within the case to elicit responses to the research questions. Emerging information and communication technologies offer diverse ways to conduct online research, observe participants, and/or obtain related documents using computer-mediated communication (Salmons, 2016). This author details a range of technologies like computers, smartphones or laptops to communicate with individual participants. CMC

allows the researcher and the participant direct and immediate interaction as opposed to lengthier online interview research methods. CMC is relatively new and untested, especially in this area of strategy. I was clear that I wanted to use e-mail journals (King & LaRocco, 2006; Jones & Woolley, 2015; Filep *et al.*, 2017), but only through reading on methodology was I able to see that there is a design such as CMC. I explore how this unfolded in the detailed sections of 4.6.1 and 4.6.2.

This current study elicited aptly named (in the light of short social messaging) nano narratives (Williamson, 2016) provided by the short message service (SMS) after the preliminary conversation in Phase 1 (refer section 4.6.1). This method of uncovering data is written up by Williamson (2016: 863) who coined nano narratives as succinct nuggets of data generated by participants. Elaborated-upon data was provided through e-mail journals with unstructured, asynchronous questions as prompts. This was in Phase 2 (refer section 4.6.2). I was motivated to use CMC for its capability of capturing the essence of participants' perception of strategy through short, succinct words, phrases or sentences and in order to be ethically mindful of the time burden of the participants.

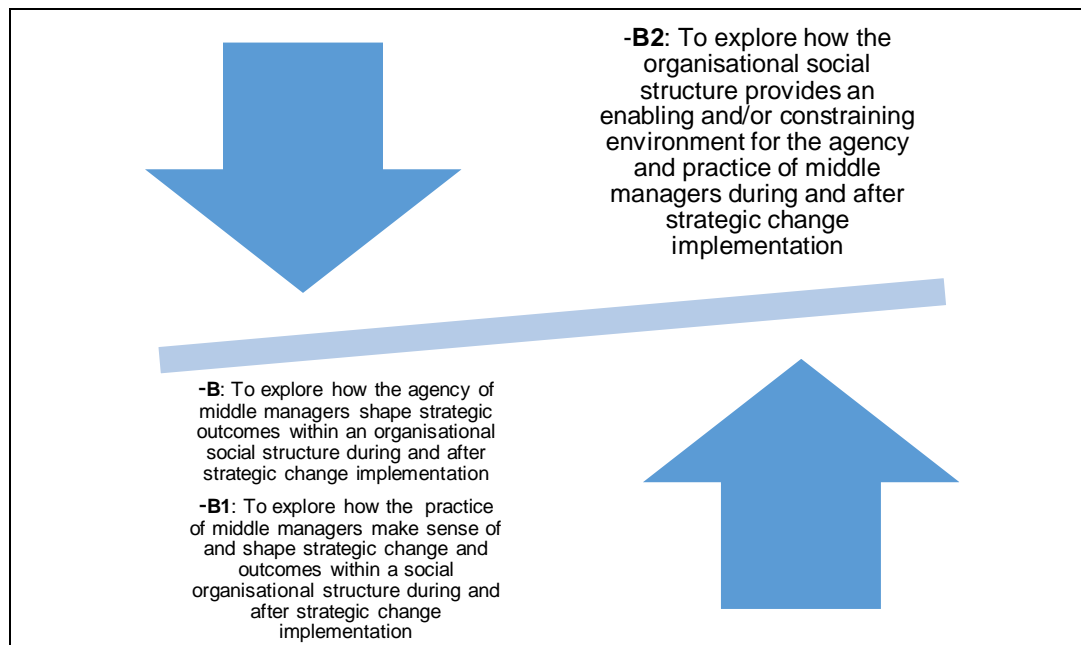
This current research design fills a modest methodological gap. Jansen Van Rensburg *et al.* (2014) explored the impact on managerialism on the strategy work of middle managers not specifically in a university context, while Davis' (2013) study explored the strategising practices of middle managers in a public university context in an emerging economy like South Africa. Neither of the aforementioned studies used CMC or narrative as this current study did. This design may well add incrementally to the body of knowledge (Davis, 2013; Davis *et al.*, 2013; Jansen Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2014) from a strategy-as-practice perspective in its CMC/narrative and 'sensing' exploration of how middle managers at an educational brand of a PHE provider could possibly affect strategic change and outcomes (Owens, 2001; Weick *et al.*, 2005; Nicolini, 2012).

4.4. Research aim and objectives

The purpose of social inquiry is to find an answer to a research problem (refer Chapter 1). The 'finding out' in this study was guided by the following research aim and objectives.

The aim of the current study was to explore how the shaping of strategic outcomes by middle managers suggests agency and practice within an enabling and/or constraining organisational social structure after strategic change implementation. I identified each research objective with its own alphabetical marker in Figure 4.3 for easier identification in discussion later. Figure 4.3 shows the contradictions evident in aligning the research objectives B, B1 and B2 in an effort towards organisational equilibrium (refer Chapter 5).

Figure 4.3: Research objectives



(source: own compilation, 2018)

Social research is social inquiry into a naturalised setting where people assign meaning to make sense of their organisational social context.

4.4.1. Research questions

This current, intrinsic case study explored the agency of middle managers through their sense-making practices within the enabling and/or constraining organisational social structure through one primary and two secondary research questions as follows. I identified each research question with its own alphabetical marker for easier identification in discussion later:

The primary research question:

- **A:** How do middle managers as agents of change shape strategic outcomes within an organisational social structure during and after strategic change implementation?

The secondary research questions:

- **A1:** How does the sense-making practice influence the strategic change intent within the organisational social structure during and after strategic change implementation?
- **A2:** How is the organisational social structure an enabling and/or constraining environment for the middle manager to shape and influence strategic outcomes during and after strategic change implementation?

A synopsis of the alignment between the primary and secondary research questions and how it correlated with the research aim and objectives is shown in Table 4.1. The research aim endeavoured to uncover how the 'shaping' was influenced by agency (B derived from A). The research objective endeavoured to uncover how sense-making (B1 derived from A1) made sense of the organisational context (B2 derived from A2).

Table 4.1: Alignment between research questions and research objectives

| Primary research question and its alphabetical marker A | Research objective (alphabetical marker B) aligned with A |
|--|---|
| A: How do middle managers as agents of change shape strategic outcomes within an organisational social structure during and after strategic change implementation? | B: To explore how the agency of middle managers shape strategic outcomes within an organisational social structure during and after strategic change implementation |
| Secondary research questions and their alphabetical markers A1 and A2 | Research objectives (alphabetical markers B1 and B2) aligned with A1 and A2 |
| A1: How does the sense-making practice influence the strategic change intent within the organisational social structure during and after strategic change implementation? | B1: To explore how middle managers make sense of and shape strategic intent within a social organisational structure during and after strategic change implementation |
| A2: How is the organisational social structure an enabling and/or constraining environment for the agency and sense-making of middle managers to shape and influence strategic outcomes during and after strategic change implementation? | B2: To explore how the social organisational social structure provides an enabling and/or constraining environment for the agency and sense-making of middle managers to shape and influence strategic outcomes during and after strategic change implementation |

(source: own compilation, 2018)

The alignment between the primary and secondary research questions and how it correlated with the research aim and objectives scaffolds, in this manner, the methodological rigour of the current study.

4.5. Research methodology as reported practices

The research methodology that follows describes the procedure that I used to explore the micro-level practices of middle managers in their organisational social reality.

4.5.1. Recruitment of participants: Purposeful selection

I chose purposive sampling as a form of non-probabilistic sampling as opposed to the probability sampling techniques used for quantitative research (Marshall, 1996; Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). I chose a purposive sample of seven participants in the operations division of the educational brand (refer section 4.8) as opposed to one from each campus. I obtained consent from the governance structures of the research site to approach these seven middle managers in the operations division as defined in terms of the declared selection criteria as outlined in section 4.8.1 Table 4.6 and Table 4.7. Even though the middle managers and I work at the same research site, data gathering by the researcher would not be affected by bias and should be considered authentic as per the research prescripts of reliability and trustworthiness (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007a) (refer sections 4.10.1. and 4.10.2). I approached the middle managers individually, face-to-face to introduce the research study (refer Annexure 4). I also solicited their private email addresses at this point. I sent the informed consent documents (refer Annexure 2) to them individually on their private e-mail addresses for prior review. The requested time and place for the face-to-face conversation of the preliminary briefing session were included to indicate to them that they were being recruited for the current study. The participants were requested to respond to me by a due date and to confirm that they would allow the initial briefing session and for the informed consent to be discussed with them. Participants were informed, at this first stage, that they were not obliged to consent to be part of the current study. The seven participants agreed, via SMS and e-mail, to have the conversation and they confirmed the time and place for the preliminary briefing session.

4.5.2. Preliminary briefing session

The first few months of the academic year at the educational brand is particularly taxing for the participants annually. I took two weeks in February 2017 to conduct the preliminary briefing session with the individual participants because they were working long hours due to registration, timetabling and sundry administrative tasks and responsibilities. I conducted the session in 30 minutes at their convenience as this was

all the time that they could squeeze into their busy work schedules. Within the preliminary briefing phase, at the time and site of the initial conversation, I shared the purpose of the current study during open-ended face-to-face conversation. I also used this time to establish credibility and rapport with the participants to nurture their participation. The participants were enthusiastic about the current study and its purpose. They felt that the current study would shine a light on their daily lives and allow their voices to be heard. I provided information which fully explained the study (refer Annexure 4), gave a full discussion of Unisa Ethics Research Policy and informed consent, with the informed consent (refer Annexure 2) being signed off. Thereafter, I obtained the most suitable mobile, contactable number of individual participants to facilitate short message communication in Phase 1 and then further contact information to facilitate communication via e-mail journals for Phase 2.

I read paragraphs about strategy-as-practice from Whittington (1996: 731) as a source of authority and provided explanations as required by the participants. I told them about my discovering of this form of research and probed for questioning. I used a question from the research schedule (refer Annexure 1) to conclude the preliminary briefing:

‘Do you have any comments on or ideas about this research study?’ (Williamson, 2013)

as a prompt for participants to reflect on the study. The question was not meant for data gathering as it would have compromised the preliminary briefing session. The preliminary briefing session was not audio-recorded as I had intended. Even though I explained to the individual participants that the audio-taping of the session was for their protection and that the data would not be used for the study, they felt it was not necessary. In accordance with the ethical premise that the research process would not cause them any harm or risk, I honoured their wishes (refer section 4.11.1 and section 5.2.1). I do not have a record of these conversations as I felt, at that early stage, that they did not want any trail of evidence that could incriminate them.

However, I found the following in the preliminary briefing sessions: The participants were excited, but hesitant at the same time (refer Chapter 5 section 5.3). They had

never participated in a research study before and did not know what to expect or what was required of them. They treated the information session very formally and professionally. I gained new respect for them during these sessions.

4.6. Primary data gathering method

To obtain the information that I needed for the current research study, I had a choice between using primary or secondary data. Secondary data is data that is readily available as it has been collected for another purpose. Primary data, on the other hand, is gathered to address a specific research objective. I chose the primary data gathering method to obtain information to satisfy the research objectives of this current study. I was also careful not to overstep ethical boundaries of privacy in the pursuit of data gathering.

The data adhered to many of the characteristics of qualitative research (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007b). The data collected by participants within the operations division yielded thick and rich descriptions of their daily organisational context. I gathered the data over four months (refer section 4.7) to capture the embedded reflections of the reorientation of working practices by the participants. I used two data gathering methods to answer the research questions to strengthen the internal validity of the current study (Barbour, 2001). The open-ended data of the current study was generated through the primary data gathering methods of text messages and e-mail journals as explained in sections 4.6.1. and 4.6.2 that follows.

The primary data used in this current study was gathered in the following manner.

4.6.1. Phase 1: Nano narratives

After the preliminary briefing session and once I had exited the presence of the participants, in the participants' own time, Phase 1 commenced. I invited the participants to provide a summary of strategic practice as they experienced it at the educational brand of the PHE provider. I sent the following text message for Phase 1 from the research schedule (refer Annexure 1) in the first week of March:

- In a text message on your smartphone, how would you best describe strategy in practice as experienced by you on a daily basis? Start your descriptive short text message using these words: 'I would best describe the educational brand's strategic practice as' (adapted from Williamson, 2013).

The question in Phase 1 was to achieve clarity for the participant regarding strategy as a practice and their perceptions of its implementation in the workplace. Earlier in the preliminary briefing session, I asked the participants not to use text-speak in the SMS where words are shortened but to rather use conventional English words to facilitate understanding. This was done to minimise the risk of miscommunication by using digital short hand (Salmons, 2016). All the participants responded via an SMS using their smartphones. I was very excited as the initial text messages came in and when I read the immediacy of the response to the prompt, as my reflexive journal (refer Annexure 15) indicates:

I received responses which makes this a great day. I am relieved and happy that they have taken the time to respond. I am patient because what is coming through is intensely personal.

From a methodological norming point of view, the essence of the participants' perceptions in Phase 1 through text messages (refer section 4.6.1) created sincerity and credibility because of its 'gut-felt' immediacy.

The flow of the research process for Phase 1 is outlined in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2: Flow of research process for Phase 1: nano narratives (Williamson, 2016)

| Phase 1: nano narratives (Williamson, 2016) | Research process |
|---|---|
| Question for nano narrative (Williamson, 2016) from research schedule (refer Annexure 1) | In a text message on your smartphone, how would you best describe strategy in practice as experienced by you on a daily basis? Start your descriptive short text message using these words: 'I would best describe the educational brand's strategic practice as ...' (adapted from Williamson, 2013) |
| Data capture of nano narrative (Williamson, 2016) | Capture nano narrative (Williamson, 2016) via SMS using smartphone, participants will be urged to use conventional English words as opposed to text-speak to facilitate understanding |

(source: own compilation, 2018)

I was prompted to do this first phase as I wanted something to orient them to the issues, but which also represented a quintessential response to their daily sense-making. Phase 1 also prepared the ground for the e-mail journal responses in Phase 2.

4.6.2. Phase 2: E-mail journals

Phase 2 commenced after the preliminary briefing session and Phase 1. I emailed the same, single, open-ended, structured, asynchronous question (refer Annexure 1) to each participant for them to respond to over the four-month period from March to June 2017 (a maximum of eight responses as shown in section 4.7 Table 4.4), namely:

- Tell me a story about your experience and involvement in the operations division and the significance of that experience and involvement for you in the operations division on a daily basis.

I designed the structured e-mail journal question in Phase 2 in an open-ended manner to elicit the participants' reflections on the impact of the reorientation of working

practices within the intrinsic context. I assumed that different iterations of the story would emerge from individual participants in response to a consistent question given the unfolding nature of story-telling (Polkinghorne, 1995) through real-time tracking. Initially, I was going to send the same, single, structured, asynchronous question via e-mail to prompt participants to respond:

- ‘Your emailed response is due soon. Don’t forget to write and send your thoughts and reflections to me. Your response has been greatly valued thus far. Thanks.’ as related in the research schedule (refer Annexure 1).

I decided against this as I did not want to add to the participants’ stressful working conditions. I wanted them to respond in their own time and to focus on providing reflective information to reduce the ‘garbage in garbage out’ phenomenon (Balogun, Huff & Johnson, 2003: 216).

The flow of research in Phase 2 is outlined in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Flow of research process for Phase 2: e-mail journals

| Phase 2: e-mail journals (King & LaRocco, 2006) | Research process |
|---|--|
| Researcher e-mails same, single, open-ended, structured, asynchronous question to participants | 'Tell me a story about your experience and involvement in the operations division and the significance of that experience and involvement for you on a daily basis.' (adapted from Williamson, 2013) |
| Data generation and capture | Participants will respond via e-mail, journaling responses to same, single question over time (4-month period as explained in Table 4.4 later) |
| Researcher will send same, single, structured, asynchronous question via e-mail to prompt participants to respond as per research schedule (Annexure 1) | 'Your emailed response is due soon. Don't forget to write and send your thoughts and reflections to me. Your response has been greatly valued thus far. Thanks.' (as explained later in the chapter) |

(source: own compilation, 2018)

The methodological choice of e-mail journals (King & LaRocco, 2006; Jones & Woolley, 2015; Filep *et al.*, 2017) lends itself to the real-time tracking of individual sense-making of strategic implementation. The e-mail records are verifiable and provide data that may be analysed in line with methodological norms of dependability, authenticity and credibility that qualitative research requires. My reflexive journal (refer Annexure 15) indicates that I felt deeply respectful at the reflective journey of the participants:

This introspection, I have come to realise, is very powerful and cannot be rushed.

The unfolding micro-practices in the daily organisational lives of the practitioners required that I be mindful of the trust that they had placed in me to read and tell their stories. I felt the importance, and the fragility at the same time, of what I was entrusted with.

4.6.3. Researcher reflexivity

Reflexivity is a practice of qualitative research and is a chronological record of the study's evolution (Salmons, 2016). As an independent contractor at the research site, I had an intrinsic interest in the case to understand the meaning of the organisational reality of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Babbie, 2007). My journal (refer Annexure 15) reflected my responsibility as a researcher which extended to me being sensitive to the needs of the participants:

I have responded to individual participants as they sent their email journal responses to me to reassure them that they need not stress about not responding to the emails as they feel pressured enough in their daily work – even though it is important to respond. I felt that I needed to do this to relieve some of the pressure off them.

My reflexive journal was an ongoing record of my experiences, reactions and emerging awareness during the current study to reflect on what had transpired during the research process (Yin, 2010; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Paulus *et al.*, 2014). I used my personal research journal (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013) to enhance insights and 'moments' during data gathering (refer section 4.7 Table 4.4) in Phase 1 and Phase 2 (refer sections 4.9.1 and 4.9.2). My journal was not used for data gathering.

4.7. Research Duration

There are two options when dealing with the issue of time in the design of qualitative research, namely, cross-sectional and longitudinal studies. I used a longitudinal study which explores the same phenomenon over an extended period of time as opposed to a cross-sectional study which observes a sample of a phenomenon at one point in time (Babbie, 2007). The current study involved real-time tracking (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011) over four months (refer to Table 4.4 below) of micro-level strategising within an organisational social structure after change implementation, using CMC. The time involved in data gathering varies by mode, namely, Phase 1 and Phase 2 (refer section 4.6.1 and 4.6.2). In choosing a quarter of the year from March to June as the duration of the research study represented a viable amount of time to explore the research questions. I anticipated that there would be viable, authentic data as the first semester of the year at the educational brand of the PHE provider is usually a busy

time of the year for the participants. The participants have to contend with timetabling, student- orientation workshops, registration of new and returning students, parent consultations, and lecturer queries, to name but a few responsibilities within their daily organisational reality.

Table 4.4: Time periods for current qualitative research study

| Time period 1 | Time period 2 | Time period 3 | Time period 4 | Time period 5 | Time period 6 | Time period 7 | Time period 8 |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| March 2017 | March 2017 | April 2017 | April 2017 | May 2017 | May 2017 | June 2017 | June 2017 |
| Every fortnight (once) | Every fortnight (once) | Every fortnight (once) | Every fortnight (once) | Every fortnight (once) | Every fortnight (once) | Every fortnight (once) | Every fortnight (once) |

(source: own compilation, 2018)

Real-time tracking of human responses to organisational social experiences after strategic implementation revealed different storied narratives across a time period of four months.

4.8. Research Sample: Purposive sampling, based on selection

Qualitative research concerns exploring humans in naturalistic settings as opposed to quantitative research which concerns hypothesis statements about a representative sample which is then generalised back to the population (Marshall, 1996; Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Mason, 2010). I chose purposive sampling as a form of non-probabilistic sampling as opposed to the probability sampling techniques used for quantitative research (Marshall, 1996; Guest *et al.*, 2006). Probability sampling in quantitative research defines the population where all members have an equal chance

of selection. In this way an optimal sample size is arrived in order to make valid inferences about the population (Marshall, 1996; Babbie, 2007).

Middle managers, as defined in Chapter 1 sections 1.2.2 and 1.10.2 across the eight campuses of an educational brand of a PHE provider formed the population in this current study. The seven middle managers were the sample drawn from a single site, the research setting. They were the unit of analysis: 'the entity that is being analysed in a scientific research' (Dolma, 2010: 169). Units of analysis fall into four categories, namely, individuals, groups, organisational interaction or social interaction (Babbie, 2007; Dolma, 2010).

Small samples have limited acceptability in the broader research community as the view is that only larger samples have validity (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). My choice of a sample size of seven in this current study was governed by the potential for in-depth exploration of the lived organisational experience. The potential for authentic data was further validated by the intermediate, embedded nature of the position of the individual participants in the hierarchy of the research setting as illustrated in Table 4.5 below and Figure 4.4 subsequently.

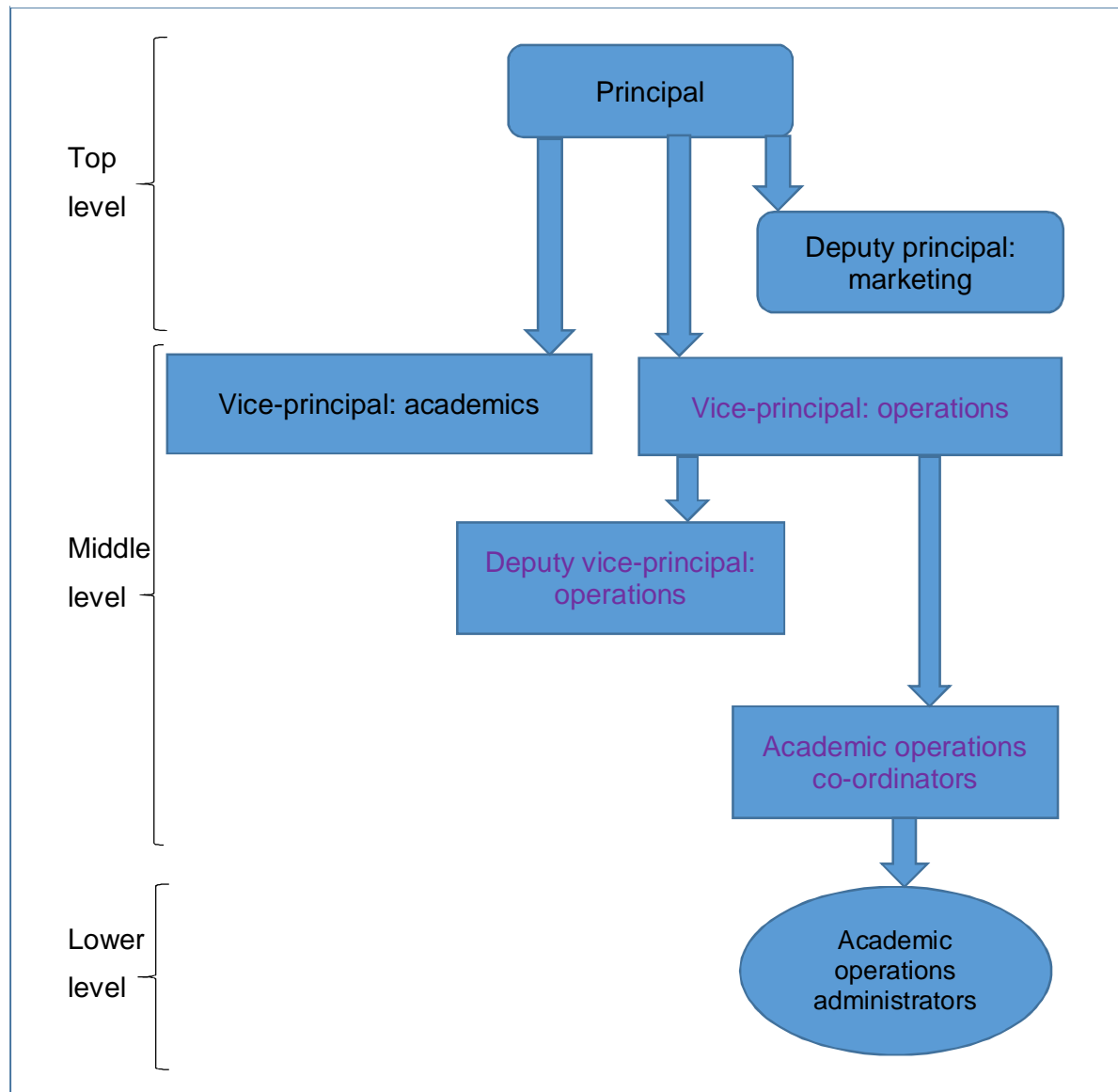
Table 4.5: Intermediate position of middle managers in the research setting

| Level in organisation | Middle managers in operations division | Number of middle managers | Years of experience in operations division | Flow of authority and communication |
|------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Top-level | Principal | | | |
| Middle-level | Vice-principal: operations | 1 | 1+ years | ↓ |
| Middle-level | Deputy vice-principal: operations | 1 | 1+ years | ↓ |
| Middle-level | Academic operations co-ordinators | 5 | +/- 1 years | ↓ |
| Lower-level | Academic operations administrators | | | |

(source: adapted from Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009)

Figure 4.4 below shows the hierarchical position of the participants in the organisation for visual clarification.

Figure 4.4: Position of participants in organisational chart



(source: own compilation, 2018)

Figure 4.4. conceptualises the three levels of management in the organisation and the positions of the participants therein at middle management level.

Sample size in qualitative research is guided by the concept of saturation (Guest *et al.*, 2006; Mason, 2010). Saturation is the point at which no new information is observed in the data. By 09 May 2017, my reflexive journal (refer Annexure 15) indicated that I had thought saturation had been reached, and then a participant

responded. Data continued to trickle in over the next three weeks to the end of June when data gathering officially ended. I purposefully selected the participants as they were the closest to the phenomenon being researched. Their proximity ensured rich and authentic data, and ensured that the research questions would be adequately answered and that the aim of the research would be met. The criteria below expands on the thinking around inclusion, exclusion and sampling.

The number of participants in this current study was not statistically selected, but rather selected according to pre-determined inclusion and exclusion criteria (refer section 4.8.1 and 4.8.2).

4.8.1. Inclusion criteria

Seven middle managers met the inclusion criteria. I chose these middle managers through non-probability purposive sampling from a population of ten to arrive at an intentional selection of seven, based on six inclusion criteria of 1) middle managers in an administrative position, 2) from the operations division, 3) who had been employed for nearly a year at 4) at the case study site 5) of the research setting of an educational brand of a PHE provider, and 6) were in possession of a smartphone, as shown in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Inclusion criteria for participants

| Inclusion criteria for participants |
|--|
| Middle managers |
| Employed at brand of PHE provider |
| Employed in operations division |
| Employed for minimum of one year |
| Institutional knowledge |
| Administrative tasks and responsibilities |
| Possessed a smartphone |

(source: own compilation, 2018)

The sample selected had direct experience with the phenomenon being studied to provide relevant, authentic information online. All the participants possessed a smartphone which facilitated data gathering through SMS and e-mail. The research sample of seven middle managers from the operations division was the best group to study micro-level strategising. The inclusion criteria for the research sample as outlined in Table 4.6 above provided methodological norming to the current study.

4.8.2. Exclusion criteria

Middle managers excluded from the current study were those who had oversight of academic support, student services and marketing. These middle managers had no direct experience of the phenomenon being studied, nor were they be able to provide relevant data regarding the research questions and were therefore not able to reveal data that were credible and reliable as a source of information. Additional criteria for exclusion was that potential participants not form part of the academic lecturing corps nor form part of senior management as the current study had a middle management operations division focus. The exclusion criteria are captured in Table 4.7 as follows.

Table 4.7: Exclusion criteria for participants

| Exclusion criteria for participants |
|--|
| Middle managers from academic support |
| Student services and marketing |
| Full-time and independently contracted employees from lecturing corps |
| No direct experience of reorientation practices in operations division |
| Employed for less than one year |
| Senior management |

(source: own compilation, 2018)

The exclusion criteria for the research sample as outlined in Table 4.7 above provided methodological norming to the current study.

4.9. Data analysis

Data analysis helps to interpret and understand information uncovered through data gathering methods to lend credence to the research study. I used in-depth, qualitative content analysis to capture the richness of the participants' lived, organisational experiences and to explore its meaning using their verbatim reflections (Labuschagne, 2003). The section that follows describes this process.

Qualitative content analysis is 'a method for systematically describing the meaning of qualitative material' (Schreier, 2012: 1). I used content analysis which comprises three distinct approaches, namely, conventional, directed or summative (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Even though all three approaches interpret meaning from raw data, they differ in their approach: conventional content analysis derive coding categories directly from the text data; directed content analysis starts with theory to derive initial codes; and summative content analysis use counting and comparisons of keywords or content followed by the interpretation of the underlying text.

I explored the subjective meaning of lived, organisational experience through stories in this current qualitative, interpretive study. Polkinghorne (1995) defines narrative design as a subset of qualitative research designs in which stories are used to describe human action. Polkinghorne (1995) distinguishes between two types of narrative design, namely, paradigmatic-type narrative design which gathers stories for its data, as the current study would do, and narrative-type narrative design which gathers events and happenings and uses narrative analytic procedures to produce stories. I used storied narratives, as used in paradigmatic narrative, which was sourced from e-mail journals (refer section 4.9.1) and text messages (refer section 4.9.2) between myself and the participants. Polkinghorne (1995) further distinguishes between diachronic and synchronic data with regard to temporality: diachronic data includes when and why actions were taken and the intended results of the actions, while synchronic data provides information about the present situation.

I was guided by the storied narrative of paradigmatic narrative in the current study as it fitted better into diachronic data in alignment with the research questions, which

called for more retrospective views (Polkinghorne, 1995). As I received the data, I was able to gain an understanding of their daily organisational reality through their subjective interpretations.

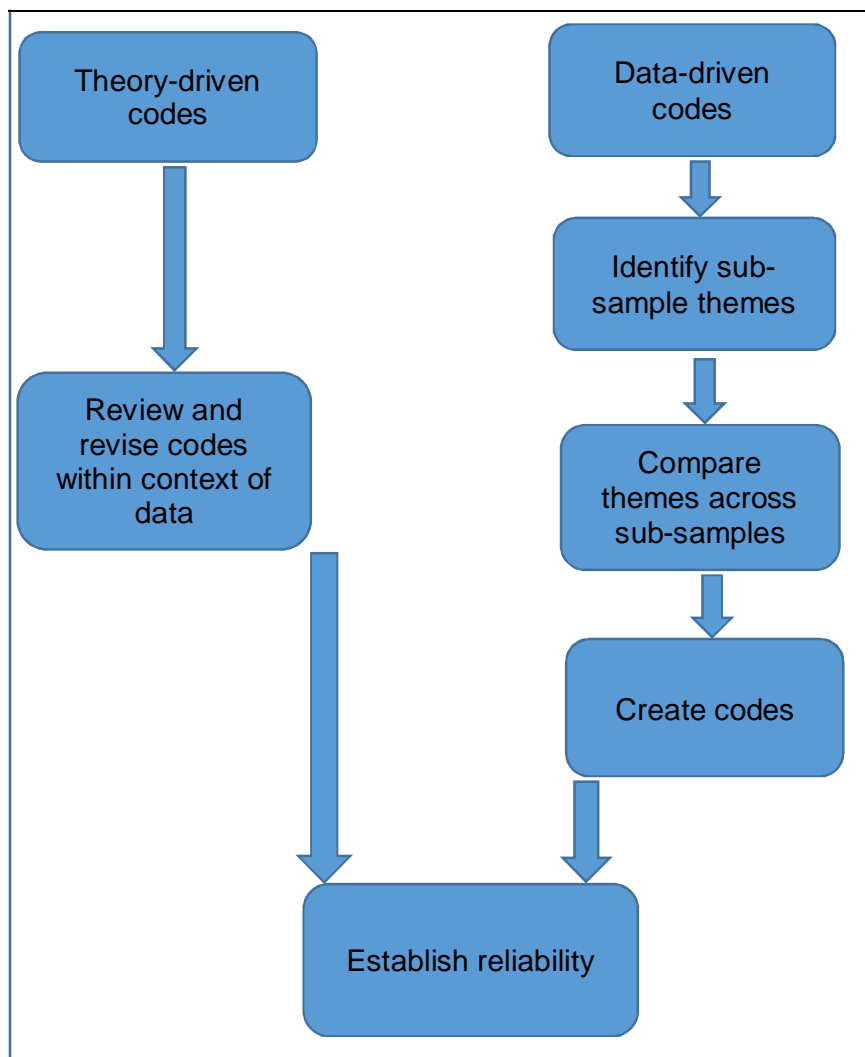
4.9.1. Thematic data analysis by researcher

Qualitative data analysis approaches like content analysis and thematic analysis are often used interchangeably as similarities and differences are minimal. To clarify the distinction: content analysis describes the characteristics of the data by systematically examining the sense of what is mediated between people, including technology-supported social interactions within a context (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), while thematic analysis identifies, analyses and reports themes within the data systematically and within a context (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis has three forms, namely, essentialist/realist, contextualist or constructionist. The essentialist/realist form is concerned with reporting experiences, meanings and the reality of participants. The contextualist form is guided by theories like critical realism, which recognises the way individuals make meaning of their experience within a broader social context and the mutuality of that interdependence. The constructionist form of thematic analysis, which I use in this current study, reflects the organisational social reality of the individual within a mutually relational context and the meaning made, or constructed, from that experience. I used thematic analysis of narrative to interpret meaning from raw data through a process of coding and identifying themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). I used a codebook to systematically analyse the raw data (refer Annexure 11). A codebook, according to DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall and McCulloch (2011), Tracy (2010) is a 'set of codes, definitions and examples' which is used as a guide to help analyse the data, and eventually tell the story of the participants (Vaismoradi *et al.*, 2013). The data analysis process was not linear but rather recursive as I analysed the data of the two phases and that of the co-coder with frequent reviews (Vaismoradi *et al.*, 2013). Developing the codebook was thus an iterative, inductive process as I had to revise initial definitions as I gained a clearer insight about the data in relation to the research questions.

Codes are defined as ‘tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 56). Codes can be developed from theory, data or structurally from research questions (DeCuir-Gunby *et al.*, 2011). Theory-driven codes are developed a priori from existing theory or concepts. Data-driven codes emerge from raw data. Structural codes develop from research goals and questions. I used the data-driven inductive approach (Tracy, 2010) and the structural deductive approach (Galle, 2011) as methods to analyse the data from a practice-based (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012) and Weickian sense-making (Weick *et al.*, 2005) perspective.

Qualitative content analysis allows the use of inductive or deductive coding approaches or a combination of the two (Cho & Lee, 2014). I used De-Guir *et al.* (2011) as a guide to develop codes from raw data inductively and deductively for the codebook. They advocate a five-step process to inductively create data-driven codes: (1) reduce raw data; (2) identify sub-sample themes; (3) compare themes across sub-samples; (4) create codes; and (5) determine the reliability of the codes. For deductive coding, they review and revise codes to develop theory-driven codes within the context of the raw data to establish reliability. Figure 4.5 illustrates De-Guir *et al.*'s (2011) process for developing a codebook.

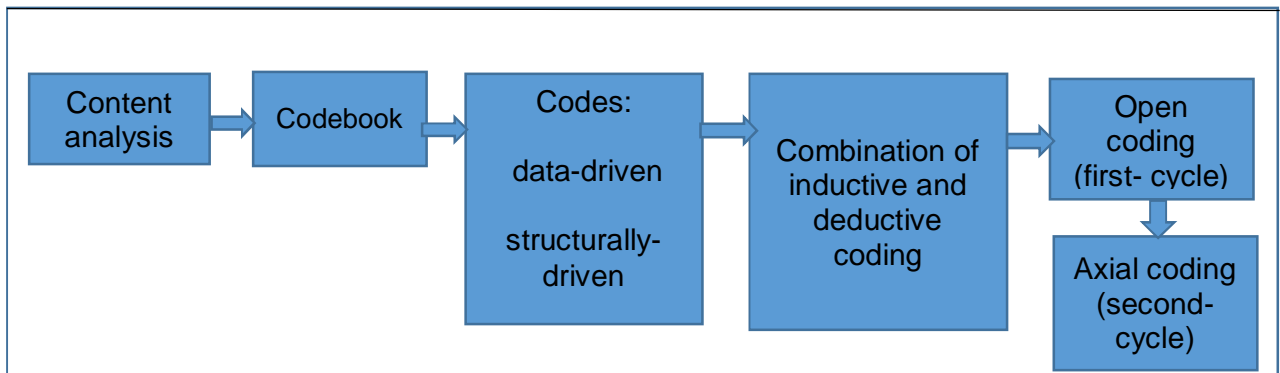
Figure 4.5: Process for developing a codebook



(source: acknowledgement of De-Guir et al (2011: 142))

I employed inductive coding to develop codes iteratively from verbatim responses. I used deductive coding to determine any contributions to existing strategy-as-practice and Weickian sense-making theory (refer Chapter 1 sections 1.4.1 and 1.4.2). I used first-cycle and second-cycle coding methods of interpretive understanding to explore the organisational social reality of the participants (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). First-cycle coding is the process by which I explored how participants made sense of their lived organisational reality through their responses (refer sections 4.7.1 and 4.7.2). Second-cycle coding is the process by which I interpreted their responses through content analysis. The procedure for content data analysis is shown in Figure 4.6 below.

Figure 4.6: Procedure for content data analysis



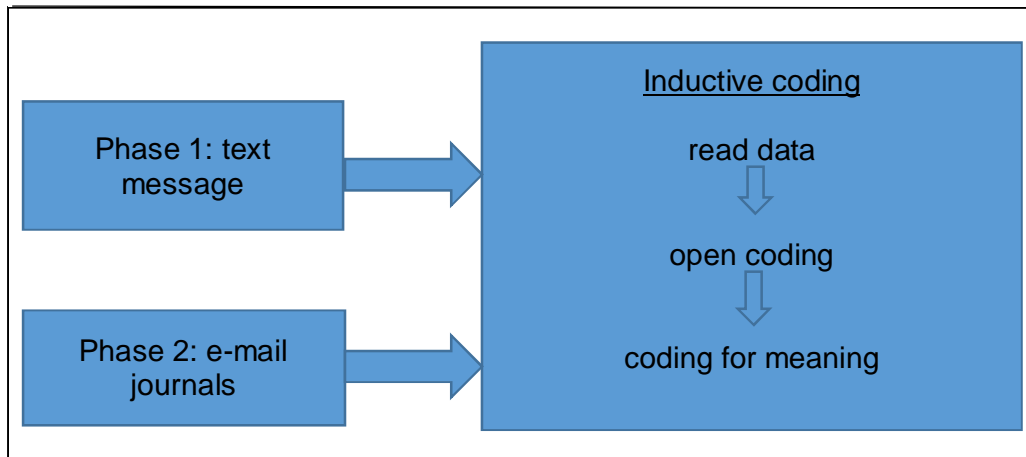
(source: own compilation, 2018)

4.9.1.1. Inductive approach to manual coding

I imported the text messages and e-mails from Phase 1 and Phase 2 into a Microsoft Word document (refer Annexure 12 and Annexure 13 respectively). I read and re-read the data from the research participants in Phase 1 and Phase 2 to get an overall sense of the data before I started to code (Grbich, 2013). I was not working in grounded theory, but found the Corbin and Strauss (2008) explanations of coding useful and sensible. Corbin and Strauss (2008) identifies two types of coding, namely, open and axial coding. I coded the data manually using open coding to simplify the data. Open coding is an 'interpretive process by which data are broken down analytically' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008: 12) to compare similarities and differences in verbatim responses. In developing open codes, I reduced the data by focusing on the meaning in the word or phrase and then assigning a code to that data inductively and iteratively. In this way, I developed 468 codes from the raw data in Phase 1 and Phase 2. Data reduction in qualitative research is defined as 'limiting analysis to those aspects that are relevant...to your research question' (Schreier, 2012: 7). I then grouped the codes further into 66 codes of strategising practices in Cycle 1. I explained each code in succinct phrases to describe its meaning. The codes and their explanation were then supported by quotations from the raw data in tabular form. Figure 4.7 illustrates the

process that I followed. The interaction of raw data and coding involved several iterations before axial coding took place.

Figure 4.7: Procedure used in inductive manual coding approach

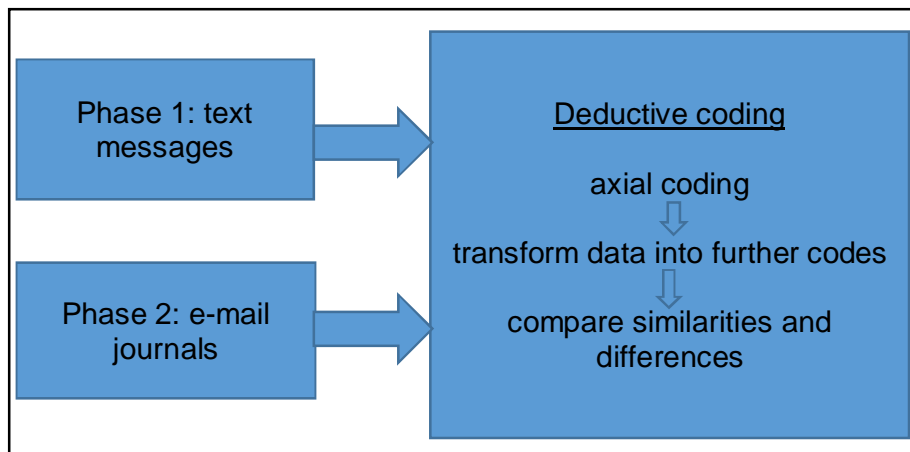


(source: own compilation, 2018)

4.9.1.2. Deductive approach to manual coding

Axial coding explores the relationships between categories. I used axial coding to further analyse the codes for meaning. Through this process of open coding initially and axial coding subsequently, I looked for similarities and differences in the data. Similarities indicate areas of consensus in the data. I developed 50 codes in Cycle 1. Figure 4.8 extends the coding process of section 4.9.1.1 to analyse the data deductively.

Figure 4.8: Procedure used in deductive manual coding approach



(source: own compilation, 2018)

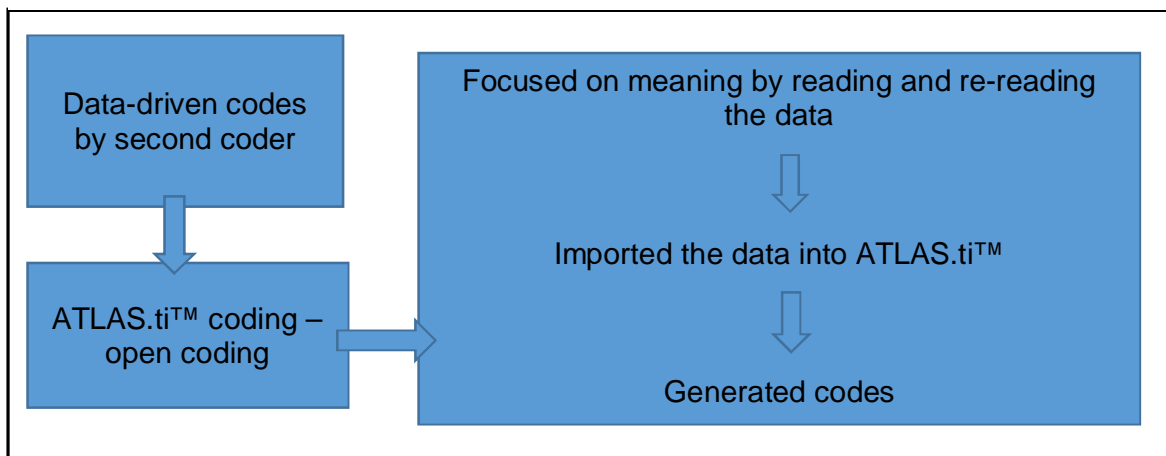
4.9.2. Data analysis by co-coder

The co-coder used computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), ATLAS.ti 7™, to analyse the raw data. ATLAS.ti 7™ is used to record, store, index and sort qualitative data which allows for an audit trail to enhance the methodological rigour of the current study (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b; 2011; Saldaña, 2011). This analytical method of data-driven coding enabled the co-coder to enhance the researcher's manual analysis (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b; Paulus *et al.*, 2014). The majority of the co-coder's coding was inductive as she had not researched the concepts, nor had she had any experience in the field. She used deductive coding when she looked for data that related to the research questions.

The co-coder read and re-read the data from the research participants to get an overall sense of the data before she started to code (Grbich, 2013: 21). She then imported the data of Phase 1 and Phase 2 into ATLAS.ti 7™ in Cycle 1. In developing open codes, ATLAS.ti 7™ reduced the data by focusing on the meaning in the word or phrase and then assigned a code to that data. The generation of codes was supported by verbatim quotations from the data. The co-coder generated 84 open codes in Cycle

1 through ATLAS.ti 7™. Figure 4.9 shows the process taken in analysing the data electronically.

Figure 4.9: Process followed by co-coder in electronic coding



(source: own compilation, 2018)

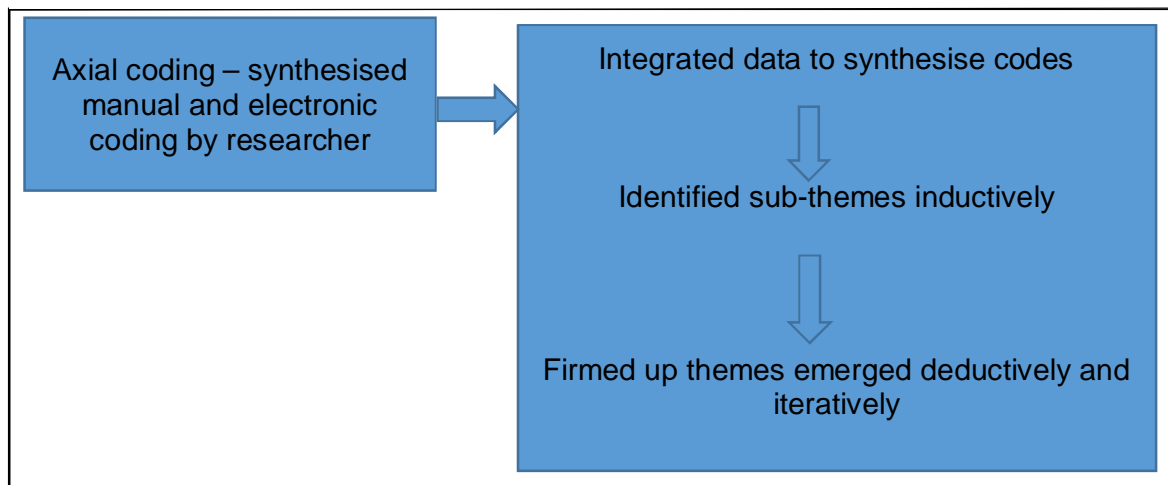
4.9.3. Synthesis of manual and electronic coding

Inter-coder reliability (ICR) is defined as the amount of agreement between two or more coders for the codes developed and applied to the raw data (MacPhail, Khoza, Abler & Ranganathan, 2015). Assessing the reliability of coding through ICR helps to establish the credibility of qualitative findings. Other benefits of ICR is that it increases the understanding of analysis and the interpretation of the data in multiple coding. MacPhail *et al.* (2015) caution that inter-coding should not merely be a technical exercise, but a real search for meaning.

When I received the electronic coding from the co-coder, I aggregated the data to 26 codes from 84 codes because of repetition in Cycle 1. I was able to integrate the data from the two data analyses methods (refer sections 4.9.1. and 4.9.2.) in tabular form to 28 codes in Cycle 2. Integration was possible because I inductively incorporated similar connections identified between the codes. Similarities in the data indicated that the coders assigned similar codes to similar data. The production of similar findings from different analytical methods provides corroboration about analytical rigour in qualitative research. Similarities in the assessment of meaning enhanced ICR through consensus-based coding (Barbour, 2001). The absence of similar findings does not

provide grounds for refutation of different analytical methods from multiple coders. Through synthesis, I further aggregated the codes inductively to 14 sub-themes in an iterative process. Eventually, 5 firmed up themes emerged. Figure 4.10 shows the synthesis of the data process.

Figure 4.10: Synthesis of data analysis methods



(source: own compilation, 2018)

The integrated data analysis approach of having a manual researcher and a co-coder, using software, demonstrated consistency of the data which enabled improved credibility and trustworthiness in the exploration of the research questions in the current, qualitative, interpretive study.

4.10. Evaluation of qualitative research

The responsibility for a qualitative research study's reliability and validity rests with the researcher. Methodological rigour to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research has four criteria, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) which the following section discusses.

4.10.1. Credibility and Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in this current study is enhanced through rich, authentic, verbatim data from participants within an authentic contextual reality. The data was thick enough to extricate meaning (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007a; 2007b; Tracy, 2010). The current study adhered to systematic methodological norming (refer sections 4.9.1 and 4.9.2) and ICR (refer section 4.9.3) devoid of distortion (Tracy, 2010; Yin, 2010; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2011). I was responsive and adaptable to changing circumstances in the research setting as my reflexive journal attests. I was sensitive to the needs of the participants as reported in my reflexive research journal (refer 4.6.3) devoid of bias (Marshall, 1996; Tracy, 2010).

4.10.2. Validity and Authenticity

The small sample in this current qualitative, interpretive study enhanced the validity and authenticity of the in-depth exploration of the research questions in the contextual setting (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007a). The participants provided deep, authentic data of their lived organisational experience which gave gravitas and validity to the purpose of the research and its research questions, for which I was immensely grateful and respectful.

4.10.3. Transferability

Transferability relies on the researcher to give 'as much detail as possible when... [describing] the context, selection and characteristics of participants, data collection, and process of analysis' (Elo & Kyngas, 2007: 112). I described the qualitative research approach, the interpretive paradigm, the purposive selection and sample of the current study, and inter-coder analysis as fully as possible. This full description would enable another researcher to follow the research process that I used in this current study.

4.10.4. Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability in this current, qualitative, interpretive study was vested in the raw data gathered through CMC (refer section 4.6) and the audit trail (Carcary, 2009) of said data through electronic coding (refer section 4.9.2). I was surprised at some of the codes in electronic coding or found some of the codes irrelevant. The co-coder and I had the chance to discuss and find agreement which firmed up analyses of the data to enhance confirmability across data analytic procedures (Barbour, 2001; Vaismoradi *et al.*, 2013) (refer sections 4.9.3). The combination of data analysis techniques avoided anomalies in the data and minimised methodological biases pertaining to dependability and confirmability (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b; MacPhail *et al.*, 2015).

4.11. Research ethics

Conducting a research study requires mutual trust, honesty and respect between the researcher and the participant. I adhered to the moral prescripts of research in the current study, which included the free choice of participation for all participants, the respect for all people and their points of view, clear consent at the beginning of the current research study, and an open and reciprocal relationship between the researcher and the research site (Pettigrew, 1990; Curtis *et al.*, 2000; Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Tracy, 2010).

4.11.1. Ethical premise

‘But first do no harm’ (Saldaña, 2011: 24; Paulus *et al.*, 2014: 24) is the primary ethical premise when working with human participants in a research study. The relationship between myself, the research participants and the researched institution was stipulated at the beginning of the current research process to establish parameters of research expectations for all concerned and to gain their trust that the current research process would not expose them to any harm or risk (refer section 4.5.1). I discussed the merits of the current study on an individual and institutional basis in an initial

meeting before the current study commenced (refer section 4.5.2) taking care not to show bias (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006).

4.11.2. Voluntary participation

I explained to the participants the concept of informed consent and that their participation was voluntarily and that they were able to withdraw from the current study without penalty (refer section 4.5.2) (Curtis *et al.*, 2000; Babbie, 2007; Tracy, 2010; Harding, 2013; Paulus *et al.*, 2014). A participant information sheet (refer Annexure 4) outlining the purpose and benefits of the current study was sent to the participants before the current study commenced. The participants were also required to sign a letter of consent (refer Annexure 2) before the current study commenced. I informed the participants about the significance of their reflections in particular and to strategy-as-practice in general (refer Annexures 1 and 4).

4.11.3. Confidentiality and anonymity

I assured the participants that their responses would remain confidential and not be identifiable (refer Annexure 4). The co-coder signed a confidentiality agreement (refer Annexure 6) to protect the security and confidentiality of the data and identifiable information (Babbie, 2007). Data were saved using password-protected security measures to ensure safety and confidentiality of responses within ethical research guidelines. The data generated during the current study was kept in a password protected folder and only the researcher had access to this document.

I respected the integrity of the data by maintaining the values of mutual respect and dignity in the relationship between myself, the participants and the research context (Tracy, 2010; Saldaña, 2011). I will destroy the data after five years after the current study has been conducted in line with the research ethics practices and requirements of Unisa (refer Annexure 4).

4.11.4. Ethical approval

The proposal of the current study was subjected to review by an established academic board to guarantee the safe design and ethical conduct of the proposed research study (Babbie, 2007). Ethical approval was obtained from the Unisa College of Economic and Management Sciences' Research Ethics Review Committee, the Department of Business Management and the educational brand of the PHE provider, to conduct the current study and before participants were approached to participate in the current study. The educational brand presented initial challenges to conducting research at its site, but eventually consented. The educational brand wanted to remain anonymous and be referred to as the 'educational brand of a private higher education (PHE) provider' (refer Annexure 3).

4.12. Research scope and delimitations

The scope denotes the extent of the research and the delimitations what the researcher is not going to do. The following section discusses these concepts in relation to the current research study.

4.12.1. Delimitations

In this current study, data were collected from only one of the eight educational brands of the PHE provider. The other seven brands were not included in the current study. The findings of this research will, consequently, not be generalisable to the other seven educational brands. The research was oriented in the strategy-as-practice and Weickian sense-making perspective as opposed to an economic model of management. The research methodology used an interpretive intrinsic case study as opposed to an instrumental case study. The research design used the emergent design of CMC-generated data as opposed to online interview research. The research sample consisted of administrative middle managers from the operations division and not other middle managers from the population or senior managers from the educational brand. Data gathering methods used CMC-generated data in Phase 1 and

Phase 2 as opposed to only using one of these methods. Data analysis approaches using data-driven inductive coding and structural deductive coding were used as opposed to a theory-driven coding approach. Multiple coding analytical methods involved manual coding and electronic co-coding. The research duration was four months as opposed to a once-off interview research method.

I have captured the scope and delimitations of the current study in Table 4.8 below for easier understanding of information.

Table 4.8: Scope and delimitations of current research study

| Areas of focus | Scope | Delimitations |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Research context | - interpretive intrinsic case study (Balogun & Johnson, 2004) of a single educational brand of a PHE provider as a deliberate choice of a real-world context to track real-time individual perception of strategic change through time to enable a contextual exploration (Yin, 2010; Harding, 2013) of the research questions. | -as opposed to multiple sites nationally or as opposed to the public HE sector |
| Theoretical perspective | -theoretical lens of strategy-as-practice was used to explore the agency of middle managers -Weickian theory of sense-making was used to explore how middle managers made sense of strategic change | -as opposed to locating the research in a broader economic model of strategy which would not lend credibility to the study regarding the research questions |
| Research design | -interpretive/constructivist intrinsic case study (Balogun & Johnson, 2004) as research design to track real-time individual perception of strategic change through time to enable a contextual exploration (Yin, 2010; Harding, 2013) of the research questions. | -as opposed to an instrumental case study which is examined to provide insight into an issue, or a collective case study to inquire into the phenomenon, population or general condition of several cases. |
| Research design | -emergent computer-mediated and/or mobile communication using nano narratives (Williamson, 2016) through SMS and possibly longer narratives through e-mail journals (Filep <i>et al.</i> , 2017) as primary narrative research methods; direct and immediate interaction | -as opposed to online interviewing or face-to-face research which would not allow for personal reflection and introspection; lengthier interaction |
| Research sample | - administrative middle managers in the operations division of the research site | -as opposed to senior management and middle managers in other areas of oversight within the educational brand |
| Data gathering | - primary data gathering in phase 1 and phase 2 kept concurrently with the researcher's reflexive research journal | - as opposed to only using one or the other data gathering methods in the study |
| Data analysis | -use of a CAQDAS package like ATLAS.ti 7™ for content data analysis of primary research in phase 1 and phase 2 by co-coder in conjunction with that of the researcher's manual coding by hand enhanced the handling, analysis and interpretation of data. -qualitative thematic analysis using data-driven inductive and structural deductive coding approaches | - as opposed to theory-driven coding derived from prior theory, research or literature (Cho & Lee, 2014) - as opposed to only using manual coding or electronic coding |
| Research duration | -four-month research study was long enough to lend credibility and authenticity to real-time tracking from an insider's perspective as their perceptions were embedded in the organisational reality | -as opposed to a once-off online interview or online research |

(source: own compilation, 2018)

4.13. Chapter conclusion

The chapter situated the research design of the current study in the qualitative paradigms of human social construction and interpretivism. The theme of this chapter concerned the exploratory process to glean the findings around the agency and sense-

making strategising practices of the middle managers, as elicited in the raw data of Phase 1 and Phase 2. The chapter describes the methodological rigour involved in content data analysis in the current qualitative, interpretive research study. Data-driven inductive coding from raw data and structural deductive coding from research questions identified patterns of meaning through synthesising and integrating different analysis approaches. The research quality, the research ethics and the scope and delimitations of the current study were also considered in this chapter.

Chapter 5 will present the data and the unfolding interpretations (findings) obtained through inductive and deductive coding-to-theming data reduction and analysis. The findings in Chapter 5 reveal illuminating site-specific insights about ‘what lies beneath’ daily lived organisational reality of this research setting.

Chapter 5: Presentation and Discussion of Research Findings

He wrote in them when he had something to say, or something he wanted to think through or a day he especially wanted to remember, or sometimes just to record the texture of his life

– Darrel Bristow - Bovey

5.1. Introduction

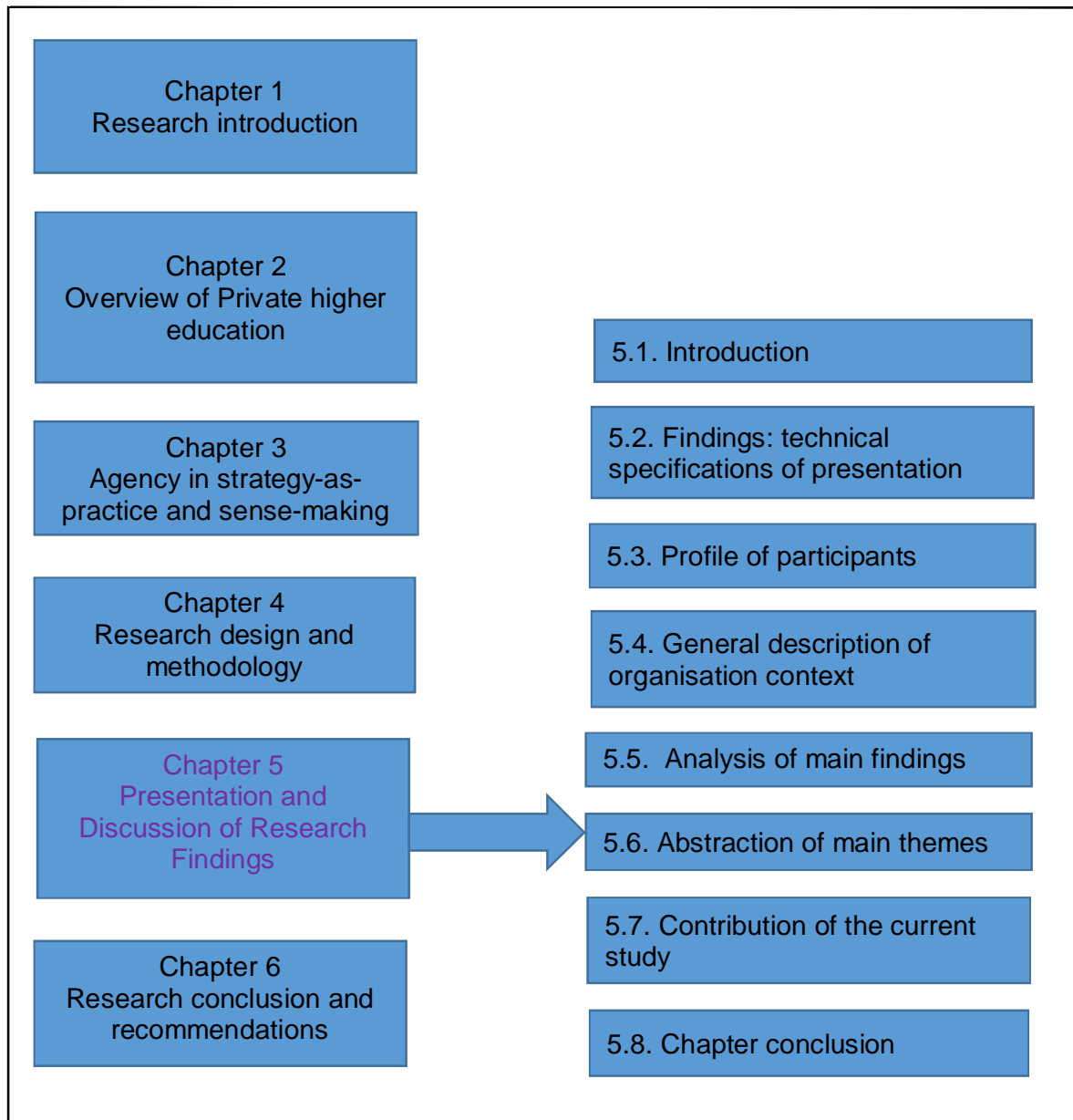
Chapter 4 described the research methodology applied to the inquiry. The exploratory qualitative research design, with the use of a computer-mediated intrinsic case study, was presented. This is coherent with the intention to explore the micro-strategising practices of middle managers within an enabling and/or constraining organisational social context. The chapter described the higher level process, and then the operational research methodology decisions. Content analysis approaches to build bridges towards theory were outlined. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the criteria applied for discerning the quality of the research and the consideration of research ethics, as well as the scope and delimitations of the study.

The purpose of this chapter is to report on the findings of the study, as obtained through the process outlined in Chapter 4. The presentation and interpretation of the data in this chapter is intricately linked to the conceptual framework of strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012) and Weickian sense-making (Weick *et al.*, 2005), as outlined in Chapters 1 and 2 (refer section 1.2.2; Table 2.3). The data relate to the aim of the research, which was to explore how the shaping of strategic outcomes by middle managers suggested agency and sense-making practice within an enabling and/or constraining organisational social structure, during and after strategic change implementation. As such, the practices of the participants are presented through rich, detailed descriptions to respond to the research questions (refer Chapter 1 section 1.5).

Chapter 5 in relation to the research process

Figure 5.1 shows Chapter 5 in relation to the research process.

Figure 5.1: Structure of Chapter 5



(source: own compilation, 2018)

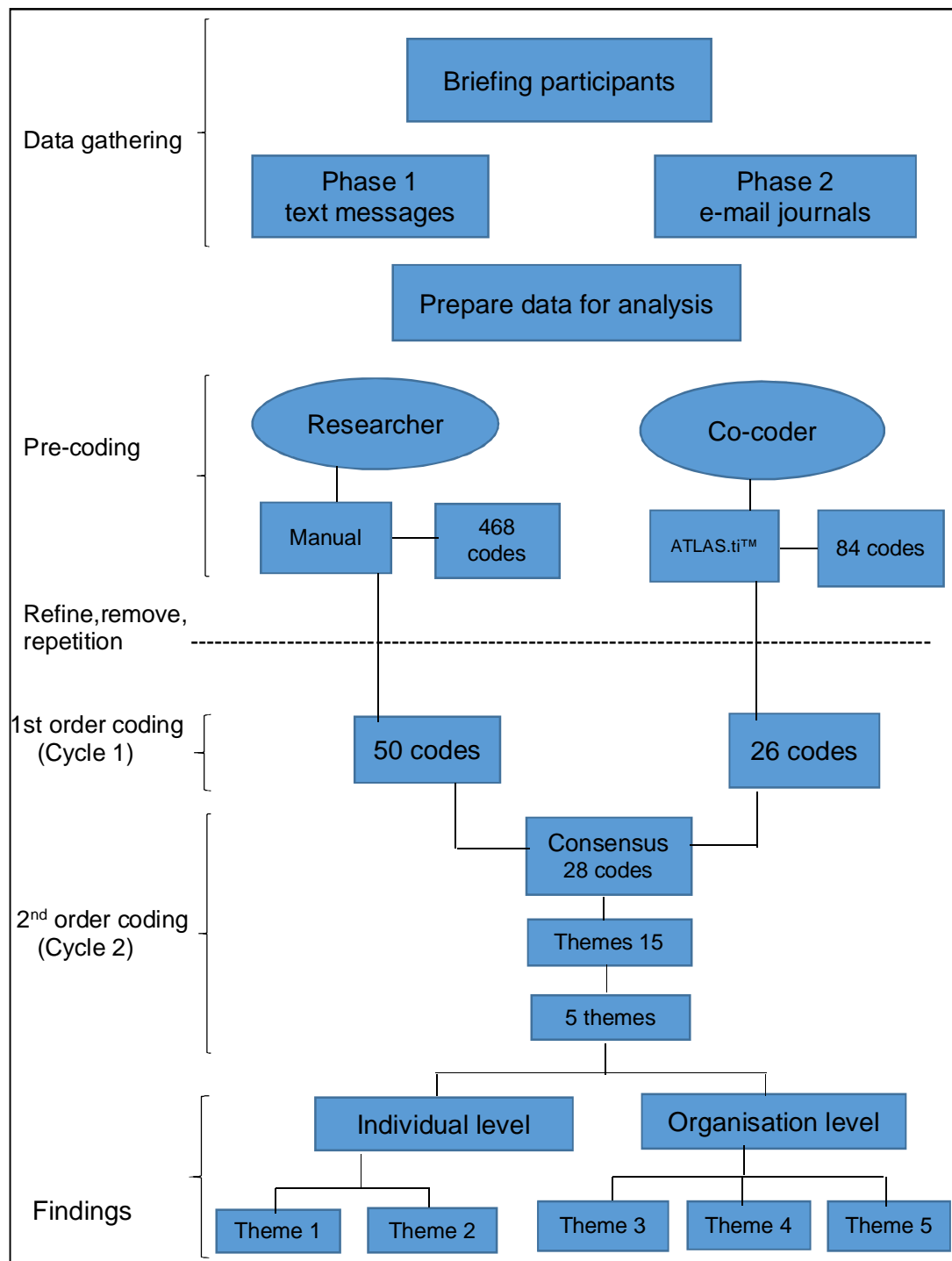
5.1.1. Background to analysis of data

The qualitative, interpretive study focused on middle managers as human agents and their micro-level strategising practices to interpret and shape strategic outcomes. I was lightly guided in this current study by the storied paradigmatic narrative of Polkinghorne (1995) as it fitted more into diachronic data (refer Chapter 4 section 4.9) in alignment with the research questions, which called for more retrospective views, over a lead time. The storied paradigmatic narrative of Polkinghorne (1995), where organisational experiences are personalised and interpreted, allows for data that uncover the participants' own subjective interpretations of their daily organisational social lives. I nevertheless used thematic analysis of conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Clarke & Braun, 2011) (refer Chapter 4 section 4.9) to interpret meaning from raw data to derive codes directly from the raw data, as I explain subsequently.

To avoid criticism of this qualitative research study being labelled 'airy fairy' (Labuschagne, 2003) - and perhaps bordering on quirky artistic - I aligned the narrative elements of the research with thematic analysis for the coding to analysis. Thematic analysis identifies themes or patterns in the data in one of two ways, namely, inductive or deductive (Braun & Clarke, 2006; DeCuir-Gunby *et al.*, 2011; Clarke & Braun, 2011) (refer Chapter 4 section 4.9.1). An inductive approach links the themes to the data and is data-driven. A deductive approach focuses on a researcher's theoretical interest in an area of research and is researcher-driven. I therefore used Braun and Clarke's (2006) data-driven inductive and deductive approaches to analyse the data from the theoretical perspectives of strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012) and Weickian sense-making (Weick *et al.*, 2005).

Figure 5.2 presents a conceptual overview of how I developed the codes in this current study to realise and awaken myself to emerging patterns of meaning.

Figure 5.2: Schematic presentation of development of themes



(source: own compilation, 2018)

5.1.1.1. Preparation of data

The volume of data for me, the manual coder, was six pages in Phase 1 (refer Annexure 12) and thirty-three pages of data in Phase 2 (refer Annexure 13). I transcribed the text messages of Phase 1 into a Microsoft Word document (refer Annexure 12) using 1,5-line spacing on a one-sided A4-page. The text messages were short so I was able to fit all the text messages onto five pages, delineating each text message with anonymized pseudonyms, for example, Participant 1 (refer section 5.3). I saved the e-mail journal responses of Phase 2 into a document, which became Annexure 13, as I received them from the participants every two weeks over the four-month period. Annexure 13 is a 33-page Microsoft Word document with 1,5-line spacing on a one-sided A4 page. I also attributed the same pseudonyms to the same participants. The volume of data for the co-coder was twenty pages back-to-back and one single-sided page which I saved into a Microsoft Word document (refer Annexure 14).

5.1.1.2. Pre-coding of data

Firstly, I created 468 codes manually using highlighters, pencil and paper in pre-coding from Phase 1 and Phase 2 data (refer Figure 5.2 above). The co-coder provided 84 codes in her CAQDAS coding which she presented to me in an 'All Codes and Quotations Report' (refer Annexure 14) and a Code List. She did not report any pre-coding.

5.1.1.3. First-cycle coding

I then manually aggregated the codes, using the same manual method, into 66 codes of micro-strategising practices in first-cycle coding (refer Chapter 4 section 4.9.1), or Cycle 1. Thirdly, I aggregated the 66 codes manually into 50 codes in Cycle 1. I reviewed the co-coder's list of All Codes and Quotations, again, manually making notes against my own first-cycle of coding. Some of the codes surprised me and some codes were irrelevant. She had admitted to me in an e-mail that she had used inductive

and deductive coding as she was unfamiliar with the concepts and the field of study (refer Chapter 4 section 4.9.2). With strategy-as-practice elements, the co-coder was able to be more deductive in her descriptive coding. I then aggregated the co-coder's 84 codes manually to 26, because I discovered repetition of codes in Cycle 1.

5.1.1.4. Second-cycle coding: researcher and co-coder in 'conversation'

I then synthesised the co-coder's 26 codes into my 50 codes manually to reveal an aggregate of 28 codes based on consensus (Barbour, 2001) in second-cycle coding (refer Chapter 4 section 4.9.1), or Cycle 2. Synthesis was possible because I inductively incorporated similar connections identified between the codes (refer Chapter 4 section 4.9.3). Similarities in the data indicated that the coders assigned similar codes to similar data (refer Chapter 4 Figure 4.9) and provided corroboration (Barbour, 2001). Similarities in the assessment of meaning enhanced ICR (MacPhail *et al.*, 2015). Where I was surprised at some of the codes or found some of the codes irrelevant (refer section 5.1.1.3 above), the co-coder and I discussed and found agreement. The potential of multiple coding is that it allows for dissimilarities and the insights that discussion can provide for refining coding frames (Barbour, 2001).

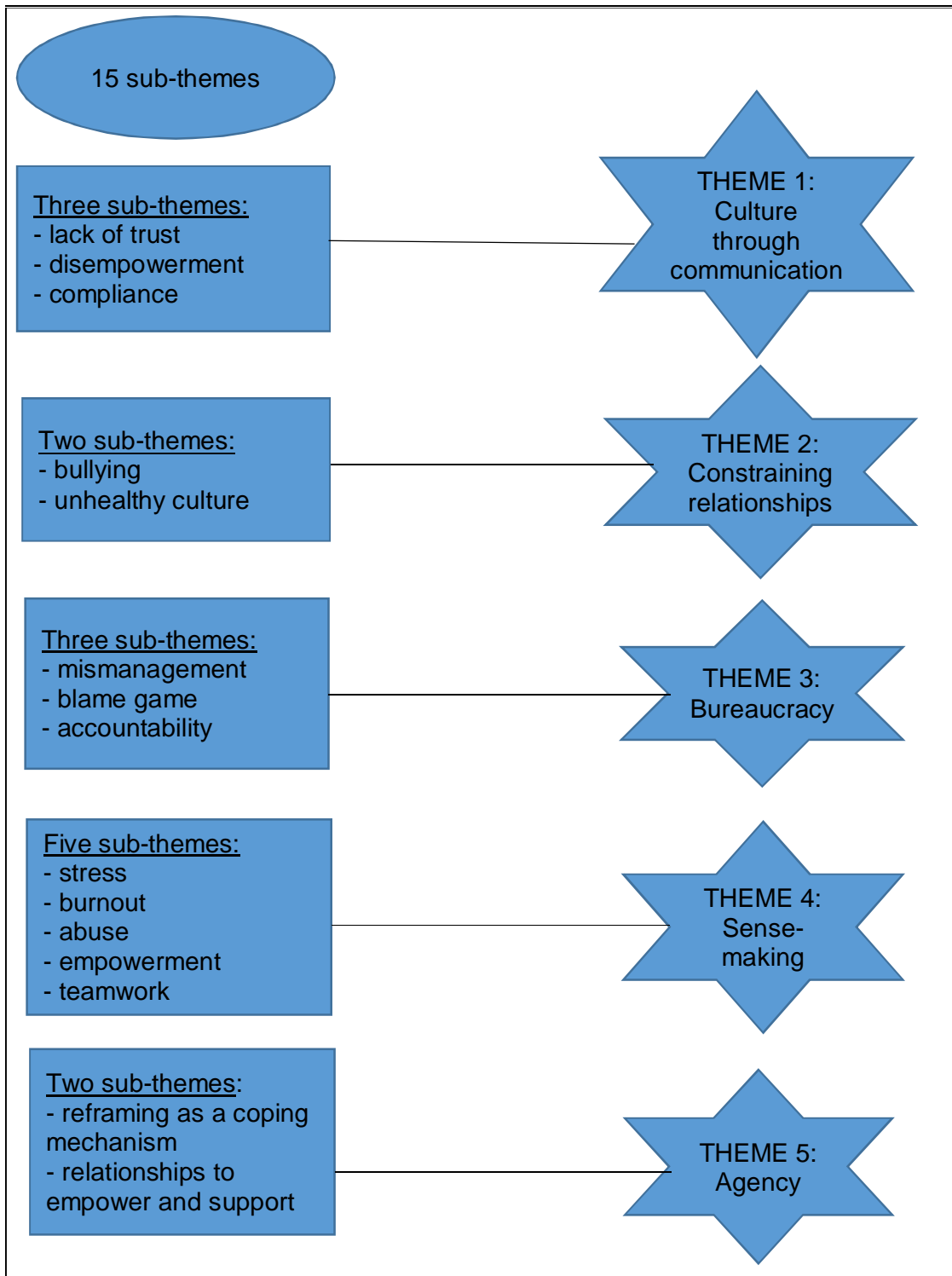
5.1.1.5. Researcher's judgements on co-coding

By using a co-coder in the data analysis process, I was able to render transparency and reliability to the current qualitative research study. Assessing the reliability of coding through ICR helps to establish the credibility of qualitative findings. In the search for meaning, inter-coding becomes more than a technical exercise (MacPhail *et al.*, 2015). The co-coding process therefore provided better confirmability and transparency of data analysis.

5.1.1.6. Researchers' codes to analyse themes

The 28 aggregated codes were grouped into 15 sub-themes in theme-ing of the data. I shaped central clustered patterns, using the responses of the participants. I checked the participants' responses against these patterns and started to break them down into themes that I laminated through layering and re-thinking the meanings (Williamson, 2013). See Figure 5.3 that represents a smoothed representation of a paper-based search for essence and meaning. I conceived five firmed up themes that are the outcome of the analytical processes as provided in Figure 5.3. The figure is to be read from left to right.

Figure 5.3 Five main themes of the current study



(source: own compilation, 2018)

Figure 5.3 provides a hybrid combination of Clarke and Braun's (2013) thematic map (distilled from the themes) and Saldaña's (2009, 2016) assertions that represent the firmed up analysis of data.

Within the constructionist thematic analysis paradigm, I was mindful of the level at which I would identify the themes in the data. The two levels which I had to consider were semantic and interpretive levels (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Galle, 2011). A semantic consideration of the data (cycles of coding) identifies themes within the surface meanings of the data. In contrast, an interpretive consideration of the data moves beyond semantic description to show underlying patterns through interpretation (theme-ing). An interpretive consideration of the data provides theoretical significance to those patterns, its meaning and implications in the context of the current study. I used thematic analysis conducted within a constructionist paradigm to explore individual meaning-making from, and within, organisational social experience in this qualitative, interpretive study. The analytical journey covered both semantic and interpretation levels.

In Chapter 1, I stated that the purpose of social inquiry was to find a solution to a research problem. The 'finding out' in this study was guided by the research aim and objectives (refer Chapter 1 sections 1.2.2. and 1.3 and Chapter 4 section 4.4). To reiterate, the research problem in this study arose from a theoretical and applied gap in terms of how middle managers used their agency and sense-making micro-practices to interpret and shape strategic outcomes within an enabling and/or constraining organisational social structure during and after strategic change implementation. I applied the exploration of this problem to a single case study during times of practice reorientation within its operations division. The data uncovered tensions (Figure 5.4 below) between the operations division in the organisation and the individuals working in the operations division.

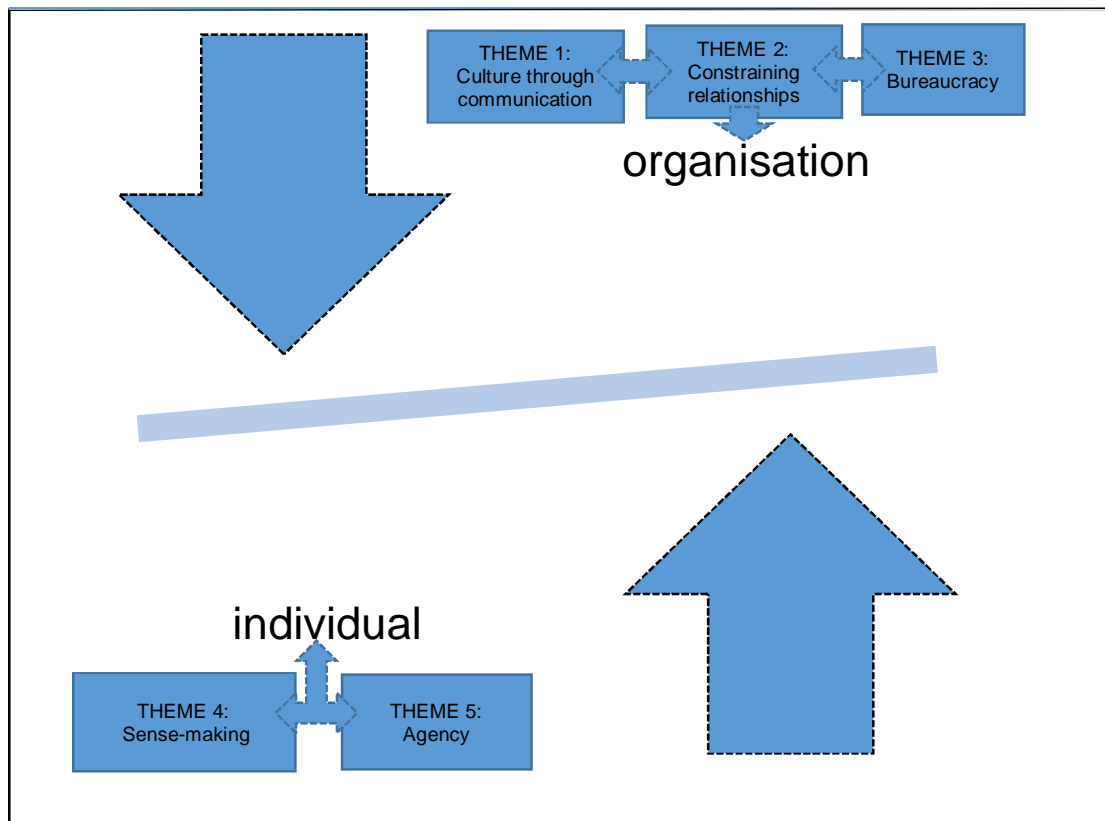
I reviewed the literature from a strategy-as-practice perspective (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012) and sense-making from a Weickian perspective (Weick *et al.*, 2005) (refer Chapter 3) to explore the micro-strategising practices of middle managers within an enabling and/or constraining organisational social structure. I provided a theoretical background by explaining how the strategy-as-practice, sense-making and 'story-

telling' could be used as a lens to interrogate micro-strategising practices and how these micro-practices could potentially shape strategy to position the current study. Thereafter, I review the literature on the role of middle managers and their agency from a strategy-as-practice perspective and Weickian perspective, and the mutual relationality of that role within an organisational social structure.

This current study follows a Weickian sense-making perspective (Weick *et al.*, 2005; Vaara & Whittington, 2012) in its exploration of how practitioners make sense of their daily, lived organisational social experience over time. Sense-making for Weick *et al.* (2005) starts with chaos (Weick *et al.*, 1993) or organisational disruption (Chia & Holt, 2007) through strategic change. This suggests a relationship between the social structure of an organisation and the sense-making by actors within that organisation. The position of Weick *et al.* (2005) is that social roles and relationships within social structures provide organisational security (Owens, 2001), especially in times of crisis, and that without this confusion would reign and sense-making would be difficult. In this current study, the reorientation of strategising practices after change implementation is the 'chaos' or organisational disruption. The struggle to restore organisational security and equilibrium after organisational change (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011) and the significance of it in the daily organisational social experience for the individual practitioner is the intellectual puzzle of this current study.

As stated, Figure 5.3 above presents the five firmed up patterns which resulted in the 5 main themes. The expanded description of the themes is pivotal in that the discussion brings forth the contradictions, which were named, at aggregate levels as culture through communication; dis-enabling relationships; bureaucracy; sense-making; and agency in the data. The more detailed expositions of the themes that follow (refer sections 5.5 and 5.6) point to the research questions and intellectual puzzle. The figure 5.4 below is presented here to orient the reader, as well as to indicate the entangled nature of analysis and interpretation (Hesse Biber, 2004). The balance metaphor in Figure 5.4 unfolded throughout the analysis, and was always at a higher level than the themes. Yet, I needed to go through the explanatory process of how themes were analysed to segue to the positioning of the balance and the themes within the interpretation.

Figure 5.4: Contradictions between organisational reality and individual reality



(source: own compilation, 2018)

Figure 5.4 presents a depiction of the contradictions that exists between organisational reality and individual reality within the organisation. Figure 5.4 relates to Figure 4.3 in Chapter 4 (refer section 4.4). Moving from the analysis level, I move to the interpretation level (Hesse Biber, 2004). The concept of the organizationally-wrought balance of individual and organisation is the main interpretive contribution. The dotted outlines within the figure show that these themes are inter-related with porous osmosis occurring across these discretely presented realities (presented as themes). The intellectual puzzle seeks to understand and/or restore the balance of the individual within an organisational social context to attain organisational security and equilibrium after organisational change (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011). The findings report on the significance of having insight into, and restoring balance for, the individual in his/her daily organisational social experience and the organisation. The findings also show the inter-dependencies of individual and organisation (dotted lines in Figure 5.4) for organisational sustainability (Vaara & Durand, 2012; Feldman & Worline, 2016).

5.2. Findings: technical specifications of presentation

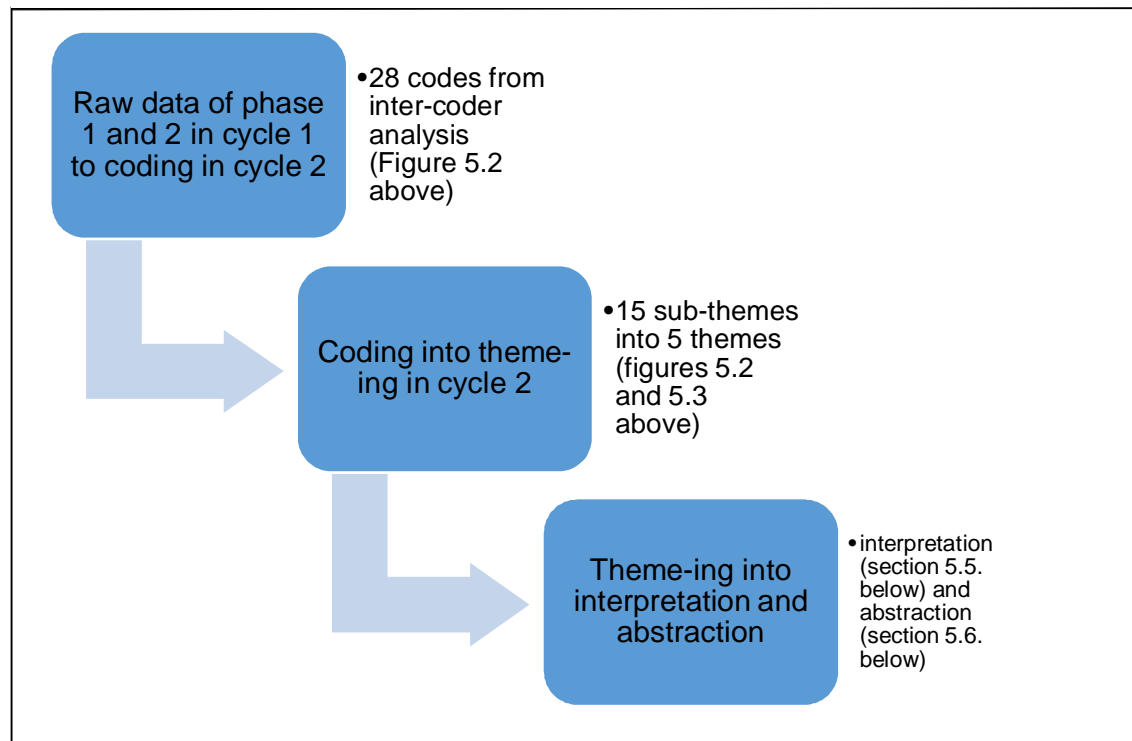
5.2.1. Referencing of findings and technical specifications

This chapter is structured around the five main themes uncovered in the data. Ellipsis ('...') have been used where redundant or irrelevant words have been removed from a quote to facilitate ease of reading. When participants used a word or phrase that needed explanation, explanatory words or phrases in square brackets were used to help the reader understand the context in which a quote was uttered (e.g. they [managers]). To maintain anonymity of responses (Aaker, Kumar, Leone & Day, 2013) as the sample is so small, participants are referred to as 'a participant', 'one of the participants', 'a few participants', 'some participants' or 'various participants'.

5.2.2. Scaffolding of presentation, interpretation and abstraction of data

Figure 5.5 presents a scaffolding of data through to interpretation and abstraction in this current study.

Figure 5.5: Scaffolding of presentation, interpretation and abstraction of data



(source: own compilation, 2018)

5.2.3. Researcher position

As part of the field in this study, I use the first-person voice. My position in this study was to suspend my biases, beliefs and personal experiences in the research context to remain objective, yet to bracket them (Gearing, 2004) so that the unit of analysis was privileged and not intruded on with primary data of my experiences of the events, or proximity to participants. As noted, I kept a journal (refer Annexure 15) as part of the methodological accounting and for interpretive insight (Carcary, 2009).

Social inquiry into the lived experience required rich data to extricate reliable findings. My reflexive journal (refer Annexure 15) indicates that the raw data is exceptionally rich in subjective reflection:

‘The data I have received is immensely rich and I am exceptionally grateful at the time and effort that the participants had taken to respond so comprehensively.’

My reflexive journal reveals that the participants’ act of telling their stories became a cathartic experience for them. The following verbatim quote from my journal is testament to the intensely personal journey that story-telling had become for them. It dawned on me that this journey of introspection for them was perhaps the first time that they had allowed themselves to explore their organisational reality.

‘Today I had an epiphany. Upon receiving the responses, I realised that the working practice journey that the participants experience on a daily basis is intensely personal and that I should be patient to allow them to be introspective about this journey – maybe for the first time.’

Although my position was to uncover findings from the raw data, I had to remind myself that I needed to be patient as they embraced their introspective journey:

‘This introspection [for the participants], I have come to realise, is very powerful and cannot be rushed. I, on the other hand, as the researcher, am impatient, because for me it is all about the data – a ‘means to an end’. Subsequently and consequently, I will be more patient and allow them to come to terms with this deeply intense journey of introspection as they reflect on their daily work experiences and involvement in the operations division and the significance of that for themselves.’

5.3. Profile of participants

The seven participants who made up the research sample as described in Chapter 4 (refer section 4.8) are known to me as we work at the same research site. I initiated a preliminary briefing session of 30 minutes with each individual participant at a time that was convenient to them (refer Chapter 4 section 4.5.2). The briefing session took place in February over two weeks (13th to 24th February 2017). The first semester at the research site comprises the months of January to June, which is an exceptionally

busy time for the participants. This period of the year is characterised by registration, time-tabling, lecturer recruitment, and other activities of administrative life in the operations division. The participants were working 12- to 14-hour days in the month of February.

Table 5.1 that follows outlines the briefing sessions I had with each individual participant.

Table 5.1: Profile of participants

| Participants | Briefing sessions |
|----------------------|---|
| Participant 1 | Participant 1 was the first to respond to my initial communication to potential participants. She agreed to the briefing session, which took place in an interview room at the research site. There were no interruptions during the session. The participant was punctual and friendly. It was my first briefing session in the research process. After a few pleasantries, the atmosphere eased and notions of anxiety dissipated. She expressed the desire to participate in the study unreservedly as she felt that the contribution of the study would be invaluable. |
| Participant 2 | Participant 2 was the second person to respond to my initial communication. He agreed to meet in the interview room. The session was relaxed and communication flowed easily. Like Participant 1, he also expressed a desire to participate in the study. |
| Participant 3 | Participant 3 was enthusiastic about the study as she is doing post-graduate studies. Her enthusiasm also stemmed from the fact that she showed a keen interest in the research topic and its potential contribution. She showed knowledge about the organisation and shared this easily. She felt a spotlight needed to be shone on the operations division and its activities within the organisational set-up. |
| Participant 4 | Participant 4 enthusiastically supported the study. Like Participant 3, she supported the idea of the study and what it would mean for the future practices of the operations division. She had never participated in a research study before and welcomed the opportunity. The session was interrupted by another participant who presented with a medical emergency. Our session was consequently cut short by 5 minutes. The essential information had been relayed in the first 25 minutes. |
| Participant 5 | Participant 5 struggled to find time to arrange a session but eventually did. The participant had completed post-graduate studies so she was familiar with the research process. She showed a gentle nature. The session was open and relaxed. She supported the study. |
| Participant 6 | Participant 6 arranged to meet in the interview room. There were no interruptions. She supported the idea of the study. She had never been part of a research study before. She was concerned that her input might not warrant being used as data. She was also concerned about the confidentiality of her responses. I reassured her on both counts by explaining the concept of 'confidentiality' and that she was a good source of information and had met all the inclusion criteria. |
| Participant 7 | Participant 7 was the last to agree to a session in the interview room. I suspected in the early stages of the research that she was opposed to the idea of participating. As with Participant 6, I had to allay her fears around participation regarding confidentiality and quality of data. I explained the concept of 'confidentiality' to her to reassure her and that she was a good source of information and met all the inclusion criteria. |

(source: own compilation, 2018)

The participants found that scheduling time for the briefing session was an arduous task. Once their sessions commenced, they were accommodating and supportive of the purpose of the current study.

I endeavoured to provide a relational understanding of data gathering using the CMC methodology (refer Chapter 4 section 4.3.4.2) in my communication with the participants. The text message responses in Phase 1 was sent to me from the smartphones of the participants to my smartphone. I thanked the participants for providing a summary of strategic practice as they experienced it at the educational brand. I transcribed and saved the responses into a Microsoft Word document (refer Annexure 12) (refer section 5.1.1.1). The journal responses in Phase 2 was e-mailed to me. Sometimes, I gently prompted the individual participant to send their responses by the two-week period (refer Chapter 4.7). I thanked the participants for their reflections on the impact of the reorientation of working practices within the intrinsic context. I saved the responses into a Microsoft Word document (refer Annexure 13) (refer section 5.1.1.1). My communications with the participants always conveyed a sense of my immense gratitude for their responses.

All responses from participants are quoted verbatim and unchanged. The quotes reflect the views of the participants and not the views of the senior management who represent the organisation (Barry & Elmes, 1997) (refer sections 5.5 and 5.6). These verbatim quotes are rich and reveal subjective reflections about their organisational reality in Phase 1 and Phase 2 (refer Annexures 12, 13 and 14). I used their verbatim quotes as evidence to substantiate the themes to ensure the trustworthiness of my research study. As indicated earlier, verbatim quotes will not be attributable to any particular participant to maintain anonymity.

In profiling the participants, I also describe the context of the briefing session at the research site. All the briefing sessions took place in an interview room at the research site. It was not necessary to pre-book the venue as there are always rooms available. All the interviews were conducted during office hours. Each participant was briefed once.

5.4. General description of organisation context

The real life problem that this current study responds to is that the working environment in the operations division of the PHE brand has become strained and pressured. Working across functional boundaries had been necessitated by resignations and shuffling of positions to make do with less staff members. This phenomenon has brought about a reorientation of working practices in a private educational environment that is highly competitive but needs to demonstrate stability and sustainability. The data from the participants paints a somber picture of the organisational context in which they work. It appears that the educational brand of the PHE provider wanted to introduce changes into the operations division while still retaining the old way of doing things. The data revealed that these changes led to bureaucracy, and created confusion and frustration in the daily work practice of the individual participants. The educational brand provided no rules, policies or guidelines to navigate the organisational change. It seems that senior management discarded existing policy when it suited them. The description of senior management in the organisation as lacking in accountability, responsibility, and co-operation was a stinging indictment of their managerial practices. The data give a sense of the perceived organisational culture experienced by the individual participants. The perceived organisational culture is unhealthy and reveals mismanagement, bullying and disempowerment among other revelations. Figure 4.4 in Chapter 4 presents a graphic depiction of the three levels of management in the organisation to lend visual clarity to the hierarchical position of the participants. I have removed any identifiable characteristics when describing the educational brand of the PHE provider and the participants to maintain anonymity.

5.5. Analysis of main themes

The purpose of the current study, as described in Chapter 1, was to explore how the shaping of strategic outcomes by middle managers suggests agency and sense-making practice within an enabling and/or constraining organisational social structure after strategic change implementation. Figure 5.2 above presents a schematic presentation of how I developed the data into themes using some inter-coder analysis

and my research judgement. In working through the analysis, the interpretation unfolded to present, eventually, five firmed up themes (Hesse Biber, 2004) (Figure 5.3 above). Each theme is presented below and substantiated by verbatim quotes from the raw data. The quotes act as evidence of authentic data to facilitate reliability of the interpretation, and abstraction (refer section 5.6 below) of the themes of the current study. The quotes come from a spread of participants who are ethically protected through not isolating the source participants for each quote (source details available in password-protected files). I convert each of the five themes into five theme statements to present my supportive (as opposed to the main assertions) interpretation of the qualitative data. Thereafter, I use the aggregate assertions (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014: 99 - 100) to present the main interpretations of the current study (refer section 5.4.6). According to Miles *et al.* (2014: 99 - 100) an assertion is a 'declarative statement of summative synthesis, supported by confirming evidence from the data' (refer sections 5.5.1, 5.5.2, 5.5.3, 5.5.4 and 5.5.5) as opposed to a proposition that 'puts forth a conditional event'.

The themes are encapsulated as practices following the work of Järventie-Thesleff, Moisander & Laine (2011). This follows Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl (2007) that indicate that practices become sited through individuals within an organisation. If the responses to the organisation become a sufficiently default position (as the practices below became), then the responsive activity may be seen as a practice. The nature of practices has been expanded on in the literature review (refer Chapter 3) and, as such, this discussion is included to clarify the presentation of the data as the analysis demonstrates the themed areas, as practices. In isolating these practices, I make the same assumption as Järventie-Thesleff *et al.* (2011:198):

'in performing their daily tasks ... practitioners draw upon particular socially instituted practices and collectively shared understandings or trans-subjective codes of knowledge, which enable particular ways of making sense of the world and which sanction particular behaviours as appropriate, worthwhile, and desirable in particular contexts.'

The interpretive frame below, therefore, follows their scholarship mimetically.

5.5.1. Theme 1: The practice of culture through communication

The first theme is encapsulated in Table 5.2:

Table 5.2: Theme 1: The practice of culture through communication

| Theme 1: The Practice of culture through Communication | Participant observations | Supported by literature |
|---|---|--------------------------------|
| Compliance | 'did what I was instructed' | Keashly and Neuman (2010) |
| Disempowerment | 'we have tried to bring this to other managers' attention yet it was swept under the carpet.' | Lumby (2003) |
| Lack of trust | 'There is nothing but miscommunication...' | Lumby (2003) |

(source: own compilation, 2018)

Based on the data, participants were of the view that there was a breakdown in communication between the participants and senior management. The daily management of delegation and task responsibility for task implementation shapes an organisational culture by the way these tasks are executed (Lumby, 2003). The lack of communication skills by senior management extended to their deliberately misinforming the participants regarding work procedure. As one participant wrote:

'There is total utter miscommunication, lack of communication...'

Another participant corroborated this perception:

'There is nothing but miscommunication...'

An attempt to alert senior management from other areas of oversight to the plight of the participants proved futile:

'we have tried to bring this to other managers' attention yet it was swept under the carpet.'

Bullying in the workplace took the form of obstructive communication to impede the competence of the participants (Keashly & Neuman, 2010). Instructions by senior management were serially changed, much to the confusion of the participants, as this inconsistency frustrated the working practices, as various participants attested:

'We would be given instructions that are opposite of what we needed to do or contradicts previous instructions, like it was a game.'

'After this was actioned it was then said that this was incorrect...'

'You were taught the incorrect way to action a task...'

'Communication revolves around the manager's mood on that day...'

To maintain their professional competence (Keashly & Neuman, 2010), the participants complied with instructions. Amidst the lack of communication around policy intent by senior management, participants still obeyed instruction as various participants attested:

'did what I was instructed'

'followed instructions'

'told to do it by senior management'.

The management of information on policy by senior management left a participant disappointed at its poor implementation. A participant's perception on the management of communicating policy intent in the workplace affirmed:

'No clear communication plan was put in place, no staff was included in the process, and the expected time of change is unreasonable being overnight. In operations the inconsistency and amount of change that has led to many leaving...the concerns are squashed with threats instead of making things better.'

The data reveals that a policy that is poorly communicated and implemented leads to the erosion of its support.

Theme 1 summary

Table 5.3 shows that three sub-themes or micro-practices were identified which related to the theme of the practice of culture through communication, namely, (1) lack of trust, (2) compliance, and (3) disempowerment.

Table 5.3: Theme statement 1

| |
|---|
| Theme 1: The practice of culture through communication |
| Three sub-themes or micro-practices: lack of trust, compliance, and disempowerment |
| Theme statement 1: Senior management display a lack of communication skills which hinders the flow of work in the operations division. Their inability to communicate frustrates the working practices of the participants. Their deceptive communication practices have eroded the trust that the participants have in them and their word. A communication plan to guide the process of strategic change is lacking. Yet, amidst all of this, the contradiction is that the participants still comply with what they have been ordered to do by senior management. |

(source: own compilation, 2018)

5.5.2. Theme 2: The practice of constraining relationships

The second theme is encapsulated in Table 5.4:

Table 5.4: Theme 2: The practice of constraining relationships

| Theme 2: The Practice of constraining relationships | Participant observations | Supported by literature |
|--|--|---|
| Blame game | 'I [the senior manager] will take the credit and if it's wrong you [the participant] will take the fall" another participant affirmed.' | Lumby (2003); Lukes (2005) |
| Unhealthy culture | 'Not only am I...abused and threatened...it was made very clear to me that things will never change.' | Lumby (2003); Lukes (2005); Keashly and Neuman (2010) |
| Bullying | '...because if I don't fix everything that is wrong then my duties will be re-evaluated in terms of my employment... This was clearly a threat but I was told it was not.' | Lumby (2003); Lukes (2005); Keashly and Neuman (2010) |

(source: own compilation, 2018)

Based on the data, some participants recognised the power that senior management possessed and how they exercised their power over their relationships with the participants (Lumby, 2003; Lukes, 2005). The style of management or leadership

displayed by senior management, as described by participants, has been managerialist in nature. Keashly and Neuman (2010) maintain that hostility in the workplace occurs discreetly so as not to disturb the bonds of collegiality. But the data in this current study prove otherwise. Hostile behaviour was expressed through threats. The organisational culture of power and control extended to senior management using their power to threaten the participants regarding their job security:

‘...because if I don’t fix everything that is wrong then my duties will be re-evaluated in terms of my employment... This was clearly a threat but I was told it was not.’

‘Not only am I...abused and threatened...it was made very clear to me that things will never change.’

‘The abuse must stop’ asserted another participant.

The responsibility of senior management is translated into their practice of what they do and the decisions they make, which has become an area of power, especially regarding their hierarchical position (Lumby, 2003; Lukes, 2005). The data revealed the effect of the power relations in the organisational reality for the participants. Senior management denied responsibility for poor decision-making and laid the blame on the participants when things went wrong, as various participants recalled:

‘I [the senior manager] will take the credit and if it’s wrong you [the participant] will take the fall” another participant affirmed.’

The data revealed that the participants realised that their daily organisational reality was not a safe and secure space. The organisational culture of betrayal by senior management affected the working relationship that participants had with their senior management. They felt betrayed as the findings in statement 1 above and here confirmed:

‘This showed us that we would never have a safe space to go to as the person we were meant to trust turned on us and made the work space worse.’

‘Writing about it makes me fearful about my job’ a participant feared.

Denying responsibility for actions by senior management was part of the organisational culture and related to the inconsistency between decisions and action. Senior management defended other senior managers as some participants shared:

‘only what she has to say is right and valid and the rest of management will just defend her.’

Another participant reflected that senior management ‘operates in reactivity.’

Theme 2 summary

Table 5.5 shows that three sub-themes or micro-practices were identified which related to the theme of the practice of constraining relationships, namely, (1) bullying, (2) unhealthy culture, and (3) blame game.

Table 5.5: Theme statement 2

| |
|---|
| Theme 2: The practice of constraining relationships |
| Three sub-themes or micro-practices: bullying, unhealthy culture, and blame game |
| Theme statement 2: The functional control that senior management have is displayed in their relationships of power over the participants. This exercise of power is evident in their abusive, threatening and patronising tone and attitude. They become defensive of their behaviour to the point of blaming the participants when things go wrong. Their betrayal has eroded the confidence and trust which the participants had placed in them. The dysfunctional relationships have caused conflict in the work space. |

(source: own compilation, 2018)

5.5.3. Theme 3: The practice of bureaucracy

The third theme is encapsulated in Table 5.6:

Table 5.6: Theme 3: The practice of bureaucracy

| Theme 3: The Practice of bureaucracy | Participant observations | Supported by literature |
|---|---|--------------------------------|
| Accountability | 'I asked...who is accountable...?' | Lumby (2003) |
| Mismanagement | 'They are...not running their departments correctly' | Lumby (2003) |
| Co-existence of strategy and policy | 'The organisation and operations is under-going massive change, not only change but total transformation' but 'There is no consistency, no common rules per manager and yet that was the purpose of the school change.' | Lumby (2003) |

(source: own compilation, 2018)

Based on the data, it appeared that there was a lack of accountability for actions taken by senior management, as a participant asked of senior management (Lumby, 2003):

'I asked...who is accountable...?' and 'They are not being held accountable...'

Another participant queried:

'Why is the [senior manager] not being held accountable for making us look incompetent?'

while another participant testified: 'Eventually I was held accountable and not her'

The participants felt that there was a lack of role definition which hampered tasks and responsibilities within the operations division (Lumby, 2003). The data revealed that participants felt that senior management were not competent in their positions:

'If the [staff] were hired without being competent for their positions then that is not my fault and I should not be punished for it.'

'They are...not running their departments correctly' and 'tasks which are crucial to the running of my department operationally was not done and followed through' another participant observed.

Another participant felt that:

'Relationships...are built around competent people doing their jobs.'

The bureaucratic structure made positions redundant as various participants felt:

'The [senior manager] is a redundant position and all it causes is more confusion...'

'What is the point of having more managers and ... other new positions...'

Bureaucracy affected decision-making:

‘...the same task can be given with up to 4 different instructions on implementation in the same day or week.’

‘decisions that are made that are not aligned with policy. Decisions that are inconsistent...’

The data revealed that senior management made inconsistent decisions and were more interested in the effect of their decisions than the content of those decisions. The daily management of the organisation by senior management seemed to occur on an ad hoc basis with the intention to subvert decisions and then deny responsibility (Lumby, 2003).

The overall strategy for the organisation revolved around a ‘total transformation’. As a participant wrote:

‘The organisation and operations is under-going massive change, not only change but total transformation.’

‘The focus in operations is on rules, practices and frameworks...’ which I feel provides a framework for conformance.

Participants were of the view that there was a co-existence of strategy and policy, but that it was poorly implemented, as another participant attested:

‘There is no consistency, no common rules per manager and yet that was the purpose of the school change.’

Even though the strategic change intent was ‘transformation’, a participant shared that there was ‘no change management consultants on site to guide the process’ of transformation.

Amidst this confining, bureaucratic organisational social context, lies the contradiction. Along with strategy implementation comes policy which guides the implementation of strategy, which gives security and stability, but this did not happen, as a participant shared:

‘Policies are designed...to protect both those who wrote them and those who are meant to be governed by them...If policy is solid, it should never be broken, it should be stuck to at the best of times and at the worst of times. As soon as policy is broken, a precedent is set and then policy loses all control.’

The feeling was that strategy and its implementation through policy is ‘non-existent, a perception, revolved around masked truths’ and that ‘perhaps this is their strategic plan to get rid of us...’ This last verbatim quote revealed the level of mistrust felt by the participant. The making of policy required administrative implementation, but if administrative capacity was undermined, there was minimal chance of the policy being successfully implemented. The conscious subversion of practice by senior management affected the job satisfaction (Ilies, Wilson & Wagner, 2009) of the participants negatively.

Theme 3 summary

Table 5.7 shows that three sub-themes or micro-practices were identified which related to the theme of the practice of bureaucracy, namely, (1) mismanagement, (2) accountability, and (3) co-existence of strategy and policy.

Table 5.7: Theme statement 3

| |
|--|
| Theme 3: The practice of bureaucracy |
| Three sub-themes or micro-practices: mismanagement, accountability, and co-existence of strategy and policy |
| Theme statement 3: The description of the senior management in the organisation as lacking in accountability, responsibility, and co-operation is a stinging indictment on their managerial skills. Added to this poor management is the incompetence of personnel in doing their jobs, and their inconsistent behaviour in executing their jobs. The organisation is also top-heavy with positions in its structure, which has added to the mismanagement. Although the organisation has a strategy and policies in place to implement strategic change, the effect of these are eroded through poor implementation. |

(source: own compilation, 2018)

5.5.4. Theme 4: The practice of sense-making: individual and team

The fourth finding is encapsulated in Table 5.8:

Table 5.8: Theme 4: The practice of sense-making: individual and team

| Theme 4: The Practice of Sense-making: individual and team | Participant observations | Supported by literature |
|---|--|--------------------------------|
| Abuse | 'These things occur on a daily basis and by the time we get shouted at we are emotional and already broken.' | Keashly and Neuman (2010) |
| Stress | 'I am exhausted from working all hours and having so much on my plate...' | Keashly and Neuman (2010) |
| Burnout | 'This has been the most challenging time for me, physically, mentally and spiritually.' | Keashly and Neuman (2010) |
| Empowerment | 'I am proud to say it did not break me, given all the work...' | Ilies <i>et al.</i> (2009) |
| Teamwork | 'It's my favourite event...it's what the purpose of what we do achieves.' | Ilies <i>et al.</i> (2009) |

(source: own compilation, 2018)

Based on the data, some participants reflected a sense of depression around organisational inconsistency and uncertainty. The consequences of bullying behaviour can be damaging to individuals on a psychological level (Keashly & Neuman, 2010). They were aware that things needed to change within their daily organisational work environment. Some participants felt a sense of worthlessness, of not being appreciated:

'Nothing that you do is enough or good enough...' and 'as long as you can do their work for them and they can abuse you then you are okay.'

This depressive state was further affirmed by the despondency of some participants at the hopelessness of their daily work experience:

'Today I went to work feeling very despondent and off. It was another day at the same office with the same people hearing and doing the same thing once again.'

In their depressive state, participants expressed fear for their job security:

'writing about it makes me fearful about my job' and 'job in jeopardy'.

Participants also expressed fear about their performance:

'the fear of "failing" is intensified and pressured further.'

The consequences of bullying proved damaging to the physical health of the participants (Keashly & Neuman, 2010) and impacted time spent with their family (Ilies *et al.*, 2009). The stressful work environment had taken its toll on the participants as various participants expressed:

‘I am exhausted from working all hours and having so much on my plate...’

‘I feel like I can breathe again, and finally get some rest. My family and my life were on hold for over two months, my mind is what I think was affected the most, the sleeplessness nights coupled with the 15-hour work days, 6 days a week, with no breaks sure was taxing.’

‘This has been the most challenging time for me, physically, mentally and spiritually.’

Bullying took an emotional toll (Keashly & Neuman, 2010) and was aptly expressed by a participant:

‘Emotions felt: Anger, ashamed of co-workers, confused by managers, depressed by the situation, disgusted by the way students are treated, exhausted, frightened that if I don’t fix it I will lose my job...’

Another participant attested: ‘These things occur on a daily basis and by the time we get shouted at we are emotional and already broken.’

Another participant testified that: ‘Daily we are all in tears...’

A participant affirmed that these emotions are carried with them after hours: ‘It causes so much frustration and anxiety which I am still feeling even though it is weekend...’

Amid the dysfunction and inconsistency, some participants felt a sense of accomplishment in their work (Ilies *et al.*, 2009):

‘I believe this experience...has made me stronger. I am proud to say it did not break me, given all the work...’

Another participant shared that: ‘I loved the fact that I stuck it out...’ Another participant affirmed:

‘It’s my favourite event...it’s what the purpose of what we do achieves.’

My reflexive journal indicates:

I get the feeling that this research where introspection is key has made the participants realise, in some small way, that they have to work together, and that this can be done irrespective of discord amongst them, and that at the

end of the day cohesion and co-operation is the way to do it. They feel proud that they have successfully achieved a goal together – working hard and having fun at the same time.

The individual and the team of middle managers as a collective, relate to each other in an organisational social structure.

Theme 4 summary

Table 5.9 shows that five sub-themes or micro-practices were identified which related to the theme of the practice of sense-making, with the sub-themes or micro-practices, namely, (1) stress, (2) burnout, (3) abuse, (4) the contradiction of feeling empowerment, and (5) teamwork.

Table 5.9: Theme statement 4

| |
|---|
| Theme 4: The practice of sense-making: individual and team |
| Five sub-themes or micro-practices: stress, burnout, abuse, empowerment, and teamwork |
| Theme statement 4: The participants felt a sense of worthlessness, of being unappreciated. This left them feeling despondent about their daily grind. The adverse, stressful working conditions rendered them fearful and emotional. Amidst this constraining work environment, some participants felt a sense of achievement and pride in their work and daily accomplishments. |

(source: own compilation, 2018)

5.5.5. Theme 5: The practice of agency

The fifth theme is encapsulated in Table 5.10:

Table 5.10: Theme 5: The practice of agency

| Theme 5: The Practice of Agency | Participant observations | Supported by literature |
|--|---|---|
| | 'I...keep calm under these situations and if I do not manage, I ask for assistance...to resolve and achieve for the day.' | Colville <i>et al.</i> (2016); Chia and Holt (2006) |
| Relationship to empower and support | 'With the help of my colleagues, I managed to carry on' | Lumby (2003); Chia and Holt (2006) |

(source: own compilation, 2018)

Based on the data, some participants rationalised the adverse organisational environment by reframing (Colville, Pye & Brown, 2016) its significance in order to cope. This reframing meant an acceptance of their situation to provide internal coherence for themselves as they made sense of their lived, organisational space. Some participants felt empowered when they embraced negativity in the workplace as a coping mechanism (Chia & Holt, 2006):

'I am proud to say it did not break me...I still didn't reach my limit, showing I am capable of more, I actually feel stronger from this experience.'

'I...keep calm under these situations and if I do not manage, I ask for assistance...to resolve and achieve for the day.'

A participant felt empowered by looking at a situation differently: 'I decided to change my mind set to accept a new dimension of my role.'

Amidst the perceived constraining organisational context, there were enabling elements as well. The data revealed that participants recognised that a supportive work environment created an enabling work environment (Chia & Holt, 2006).

A participant attested that a supportive work environment would improve performance:

'I felt that when given the right support, any employee will blossom and prosper, but an overwhelmed and unappreciated employee will often not take pride in his/her work...'

A supportive work environment also made for feelings of appreciation in the workplace:

'You can do it. We know you can...The faith in me is appreciated and 'feel good'.'

Besides showing support from senior management, the data also revealed that participants were supportive of each other (Lumby, 2003) when they needed each other the most:

‘With the help of my colleagues, I managed to carry on’ and ‘This I cannot do without assistance from my colleagues’

Another participant affirmed:

‘Team cohesion...can be difficult to achieve, but when it does happen, what a beautiful thing it is.’

The data revealed that the relationships shared among colleagues within this dysfunctional environment were treasured:

‘The team really banded together, we laughed, we moaned, but we persevered and it was glorious...This left me feeling better about my workplace and my colleagues, that this was not only my job, but also a place I could enjoy and build friendships.’

The participants felt that assuming functional control of one’s organisational space was empowering. Participants felt that empowering oneself to the point of resigning one’s position was assuming functional control as shared by various participants:

‘This is why the other staff have left and the current staff are looking for work.’

‘...2 of the office staff are leaving in the next month or two...’

Theme 5 summary

Table 5.11 shows that two sub-themes or micro-practices were identified which related to the theme of the practice of agency, namely, (1) reframing as a coping mechanism, and (2) relationships to empower and support.

Table 5.11: Theme statement 5

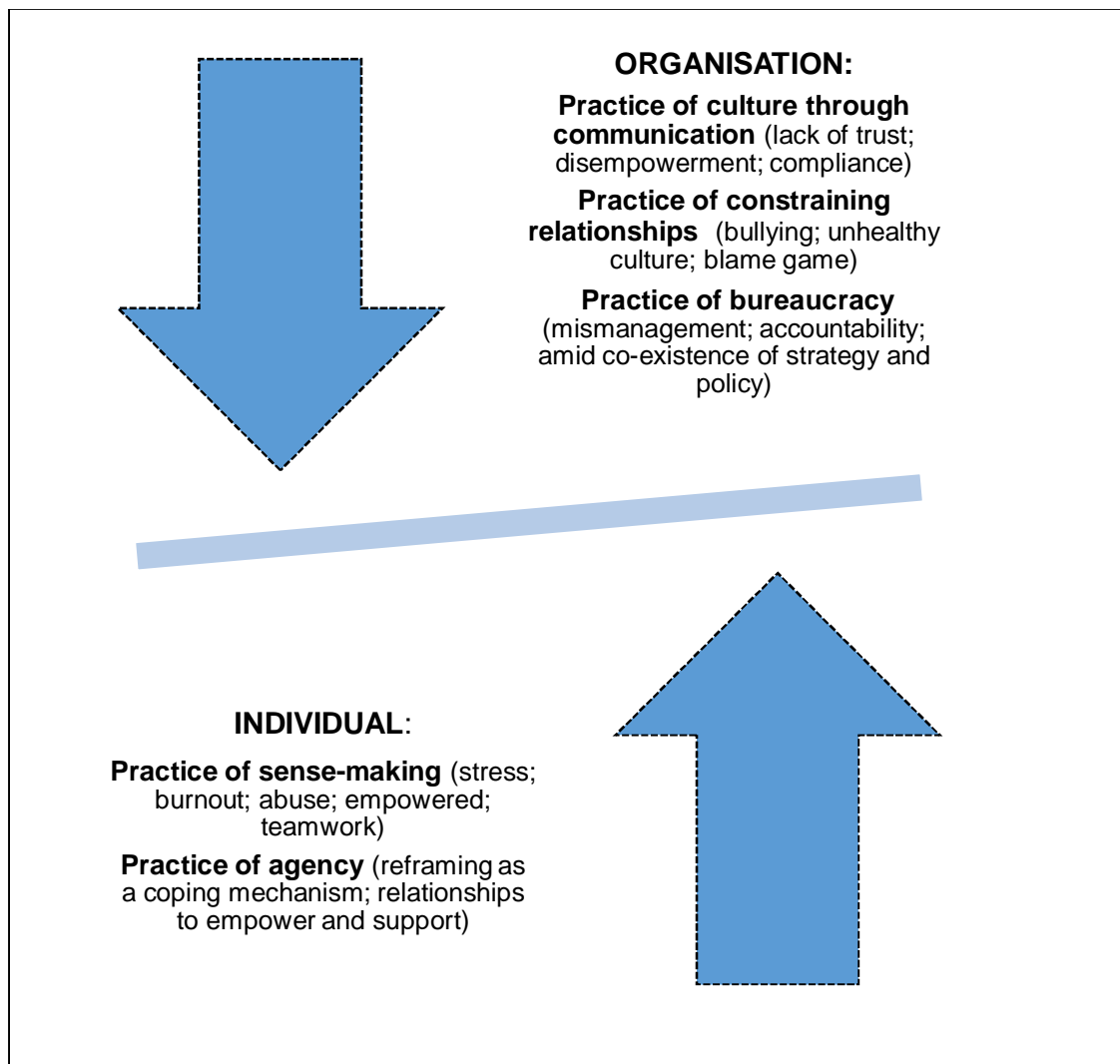
| |
|---|
| Theme 5: The practice of agency |
| Two sub-themes or micro-practices: reframing as a coping mechanism, and relationships to empower and support |
| Theme statement 5: The participants exercised functional control when they empowered themselves in the workplace by gaining a different perspective on things, by taking responsibility for their own deadlines, by building supportive networks amongst themselves and by building relationships with their colleagues. Resigning from one's job is also seen as empowerment and agency. The organisational environment is enabled when senior management encourages the participants to have agency within the work space. |

(source: own compilation, 2018)

5.5.6. Summary of main themes

I identified five main themes in the current study, three of which I related to the organisational social structure (the practice of culture through communication, the practice of constraining relationships, and the practice of bureaucracy), and two of which I related to the individual in the organisation (the practice of sense-making: individual and team, and the practice of agency). The over-arching five themes which I have identified are conceptually illustrated in Figure 5.6 below.

Figure 5.6: Summary of over-arching themes: Interpretation.



(source: own compilation, 2018)

5.6. Abstraction of main themes

The following section abstracts the five main themes and synthesises them with the theory to present a higher-order interpretation in relation to the primary and secondary research questions of the current study. Each research question is answered separately, first the two secondary research questions, then the primary research question.

5.6.1. A2: How is the organisational social structure an enabling and/or constraining environment for the middle manager to shape and influence strategic outcomes?’

The following section discusses the secondary research question A2 in relation to the theme of culture through communication and synthesises it with the theory.

5.6.1.1. The practice of culture through communication

The communication culture in the organisation allowed interpersonal communication situations to escalate to the extent of abusive and bullying behaviour (Keashly & Neuman, 2010). Practicing an organisational culture is: ‘the temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of sayings and doings’ (Schatzki, 1996: 289). Chia and Mackay (2007: 227) contend that ‘practices are not so much the visible doing of actors per se’ but an observation and recognition of practices that become culturally embedded within the organisational space over time. The values of the individual participants were expressed in their need for consistency, safety and security within this inconsistent and deceptive organisational communication space over time. The individual participants cognitively (Maitlis, Vogus & Lawrence, 2013) recognised an organisational culture of structural interactive complexity through inconsistent and deceptive communication practices by senior management (Clegg, Cunha & Cunha, 2002) as drivers of strategy (Burgelman *et al.*, 2018). Structural organisational processes (Weick *et al.*, 2005; Mantere, 2008) by senior management, like a communication plan, was needed to facilitate the process of strategic change to lend predictability and stability. The participants recognised that this action by senior management was lacking. Without this guidance, the individual participants recognised the contradiction between organisational and individual communication practices which created confusion for them in their quest for balance and consistency in communication practices (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). This lack of guidance pointed to a constraining organisational context. Yet, amidst all of this, the participants still complied with what they had been ordered to do: ‘power can be at work, inducing compliance’ (Lukes, 2005: 136). All senior management had to do was to continue their pattern of communication behaviour in the organisational space to bring out the

desired results of dominance and compliance (Lukes, 2005) by the participants. Power thus becomes functional and intentional.

The finding is that senior management hindered the flow of work and frustrated the working practices of the participants in the operations division. There was no communication plan to guide the process of strategic change. Their deceptive, mixed communication practices had eroded the trust that the participants had in them and their word. Yet, amidst all of this, the participants still complied with what they had been ordered to do. The participants cognitively recognised the constraining communication practices by senior management.

5.6.1.2. The practice of constraining relationships

The following section discusses the secondary research question A2 in relation to the theme of constraining relationships and synthesises it with the theory.

The data revealed that there was a consistent organisational culture of power and influence by senior management. Lukes (2005: 30) defines power as 'A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests'. Keashly and Neuman (2010) contend that power differences could be a defining characteristic in identifying bullying behaviour amongst colleagues, especially at different hierarchical levels. Workplace bullying finds fertile ground when an organisation's culture and concomitant climate allows it. Workplace bullying affects the quality of interpersonal relationships in particular and the organisation in general. The individual participants recognised the power relationship reflected in the organisational culture while the senior management (organisation) refused to accept its existence. People's interests are exogenously defined by the organisation through which they lose or gain (Dowding, 2006). As such, senior management, as beneficiaries of the power dynamic within the organisation, will defend the structural power-relations paradigm which exists within the organisation. Senior management used denial as avoidance to accept inconsistency in their behaviour. This recognition of inconsistency and bullying behaviour erodes and is contrary to an educational institution's espoused ethos of collegiality and civility (Keashly & Neuman, 2010). This recognition of cognitive

complexity in the organisational socio-cultural context revealed their retrospective sense-making (Colville *et al.*, 2016) of organisational contradictions.

The individual participants recognise the relationality of the organisation and the individual therein on a cognitive and emotional level (Thompson & Stapleton, 2009) (refer section 5.6.1.3). Their recognition of a relational view of organisational change is their way of purposive action in the face of an organisational culture of power (Lukes, 2005). Purposive action, or autonomy, is defined by Dowding (2006) as someone acting through his/her own self-will. The participants were behaving intentionally in the face of an organisational culture of dominance (Lukes, 2005).

The finding is that the functional control that senior management had was displayed in their relationships of power or dominance (Lukes, 2005; Keashly & Neuman, 2010) over the participants which found fertile ground in the enabling organisational culture and climate (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). This practice of power was evident in their bullying behaviour. Senior management became defensive of their behaviour to the point of blaming the participants when things went wrong. Their betrayal had eroded the confidence and trust which the participants had placed in them.

5.6.1.3. The practice of bureaucracy

The following section discusses the secondary research question A2 in relation to the theme of bureaucracy and synthesises it with the theory.

The prevalent logic of organisational theory and practice is that an organisation is shaped by rationality and order. But in the turbulent and complex environments in which organisations operate, the organisation and its organisational members or employees often move in different and competing directions. For Clegg, Cunha and Cunha (2002: 483), 'All organisation is founded on paradox': an organisation is one of 'order and control' which contains an individual who is 'free, creative and independent'. The resultant organisational experience is one of 'pressures, paradox and contradiction' (Tretheway & Ashcraft, 2004: 81). Weick (1993) and Weick *et al.* (2005) proffer a conventional view of an organisation, which this current study follows. They

contend that an organisational social structure provides a framework of roles, rules and authority relationships within which the human actor navigates daily organisational life. This perception of an organisational framework dove-tailed with that of the experience of the individual participants (section 5.4.3) in their quest for meaning to explain what was happening (Colville *et al.*, 2016). The need expressed by the participants for organisational security where meaning is mutually constituted and constitutive (Weick, 1993; Weick *et al.*, 2005) in the face of change displayed retrospective sense-making (Colville *et al.*, 2016), which senior management paid insufficient attention to.

The competence of how senior management do strategy, and how well they do it, is integral to the strategy-as-practice perspective (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012; Whittington, 1993; 2003; 2006; 2007). The participants recognised that senior management displayed incompetent and inconsistent practices in doing their jobs (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). They also recognised that the organisation was top-heavy with positions in its structure which had added to the mismanagement through its reporting practices. The enabling environment of an organisation having a strategy and policies in place to implement strategic change were eroded through constraints of poor implementation by senior management (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007).

I feel that the reorientation of working practices at the educational brand represents an organisational breakdown (Sandberg *et al.*, 2011) (refer Chapter 3 section 3.6). Chia and Holt (2006) advocate consistency of action for strategy, or strategic change, to take place. The nexus of organisational routines, practices and structure create stability for the practitioner (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007) (refer Chapter 3 Figure 3.2). In the face of change and reorientation, the organisational stability of the middle managers is disturbed through inconsistent implementation of practices by senior management. The middle managers need organisational security of the Weickian (1993, 2005) kind to give stability to their 'roles, relationships and [the] organisation' (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008: 234) to make sense of the organisational work environment.

The finding is that the organisational disruption (Heidegger, 1962; Weick, 2005; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2001) provides an opportunity for middle managers to confront their way of being or practice in the organisational context. For the participants to cope,

they adopted 'practical coping' (Chia & Holt, 2006; Segal, 2010) of practice theory as their strategic response. In the absence of the strategic realignment of the organisation by senior management, the middle managers took ownership by responding through their agency and practical coping (refer section 5.5.5). In the absence of organisational stability and security, they assumed functional control within their organisational space and were able to rise above organisational constraints. The participants expressed their human agency relationally through purposive action of reflection and the micro-practices of agency (refer section 5.5.5) and sense-making (refer section 5.5.4).

5.6.2. A1: How does the sense-making practices influence the strategic change intent within the organisational social structure?

The following section discusses the secondary research question A1 in relation to the theme of sense-making and synthesises it with the theory.

5.6.2.1. The practice of sense-making: individual and team

The retrospective nature of sense-making (Colville *et al.*, 2016) is highlighted when the participants in the current study made sense of their daily organisational social reality through social constructionism (Braun & Clarke, 2006) by assigning meaning to their lived organisational socio-cultural experiences within the operations division. Their daily organisational reality is one of stress and burnout in a dysfunctional organisational space which proved constraining. They experience this reality as individuals, but they also share it relationally with the other participants in the operations division. The organisational social structure is revealed in the social and relational areas of the individual and team as a collective. This relationality enables them to make individual and communal sense of their organisational reality. It is through the entanglement of their agency and sense-making at micro-levels that the organisational reality does not define them, but rather allows them to cope practically. This retrospective sense-making practice of understanding reality backwards was an ongoing activity over the duration of the study to create meaning for themselves in an effort towards stability in the face of organisational change (Weick, 1993; Mantere,

2008). In organising and sense-making, the dynamic complexity within which organisations operate means that 'change is not only discontinuous, but continually discontinuous' (Colville *et al.*, 2016). Weick *et al.* (2005: 409) refers to this phenomenon as making 'plausible sense retrospectively' of complex organisational realities. A Weickian sense-making perspective contends that an organisation emerges prospectively through the retrospective sense-making practices (Colville *et al.*, 2016) of its organisational members as sense-making is what constitutes the organisational environment (Weick *et al.*, 2005).

The individuals made sense of adverse working conditions cognitively and emotionally (Thompson & Stapleton, 2009). Cognitive perception of adverse working conditions was challenging for the participants. Cognitively, the individual participants had to implement the reorientation of working practices in the operations division as intermediaries between top management and lower-level management (Floyd, 2016) (refer Chapter 4 Figure 4.4). The participants had to not only make sense of the organisational contradiction, but they also had to embody their way into meaning through practice (Thompson & Stapleton, 2009; Colville *et al.*, 2016). Colville *et al.* (2016: 6) refers to these concepts as 'lessening ambiguity' and 'reducing equivocality' respectively. Emotionally, their sense of worthlessness left them feeling despondent about their daily work practices in a constrained work environment. The individual participants made sense of strategic change in the operations division through practical coping (Chia & Holt, 2006; Segal, 2010) (refer section 5.6.1.3)

Emotionally, the integration of work and family life was not possible for them due to the adverse working conditions (Ilies *et al.*, 2009). For the aforementioned scholars, 'affective work-family spillover' meant that an employee's job satisfaction influenced their feelings and attitudes experienced at home with their families (Ilies *et al.*, 2009: 87). The affective nature of an attitude towards work has a specific object, namely, job satisfaction. A relationship exists between job satisfaction and productivity. If this relationship is disturbed through bullying behaviour, productivity will be affected adversely (Keashly & Neuman, 2010) for the individual and the organisation. For the participants, their job satisfaction is a stressful experience. Yet, findings indicate that through sense-making and reframing (Colville *et al.*, 2016), they were able to cope

practically (Chia & Holt, 2006; Segal, 2010) with their constraining organisational reality.

The participants consciously embraced their constrained, lived organisational socio-cultural experience in homage to the ontological posture that Chia and Mackay (2007: 225) prescribes: 'Changes are only brought about through the active, deliberate intentions and actions of individuals'. Action is integral to sense-making as the participants move from retrospective sense-making to prospective sense-making in an embodiment of action (Thompson & Stapleton, 2009; Colville *et al.*, 2016) through their micro-strategising practice of agency.

The finding is that the participants felt a sense of worthlessness, of being unappreciated, which left them feeling despondent about their daily work practices. The adverse, stressful working conditions rendered them fearful and emotional. Amidst this constraining work environment, by cognitively and emotionally responding to their adverse, lived organisational socio-cultural experience, their journey of reflective awareness enabled them to respond strategically to workplace challenges to ultimately improve their performance and gain a sense of individual equilibrium.

5.6.3. A: How do middle managers as agents of change shape strategic outcomes within an organisational social structure?

The following section discusses the primary research question A in relation to the theme of agency and synthesises it with the theory.

5.6.3.1. The practice of agency

Contradictory communication practices by senior management proved enabling when they encouraged participants to have agency within the work space as it was within their control to do so.

The individual participants as agents within the organisational social structure frame and reframe (Colville *et al.*, 2016) their daily organisational experience into reflective awareness. Through their practical coping (Chia & Holt, 2006; Segal, 2010) (refer section 5.6.1.3) they assume agency in their daily organisational lives to carve out a new way of doing things within the organisational social structure. Their new practice makes more sense to them in the absence of direction and strategic realignment from senior management (Weick *et al.*, 2005; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). They are able to step back from what they routinely do to critically reflect about themselves and their practices to potentially reveal their logic of practice (Colville *et al.*, 2016) (refer Annexures 12, 13 and 14). Reflection on practice through story-telling also affirms the assumption that story-telling, as a sense-making practice, has the potential to shape strategy (Colville *et al.*, 2016) (refer Chapter 3 Table 3.8).

The individual participants exercised functional control when they empowered themselves in the workplace by consciously choosing (Chia & Mackay, 2007) a different perspective on things. Their agency through empowerment and functional control (Chia & Mackay, 2007) extended to some of them resigning from their jobs. Dissatisfaction with their jobs and lack of collegiality are factors which could result in individuals deciding to leave educational institutions (Keashly & Neuman, 2010). Six months into this year and there have been three resignations from the sample of seven. This functional control (Chia & Mackay, 2007) was seen as taking control of their individual, and organisational, destiny.

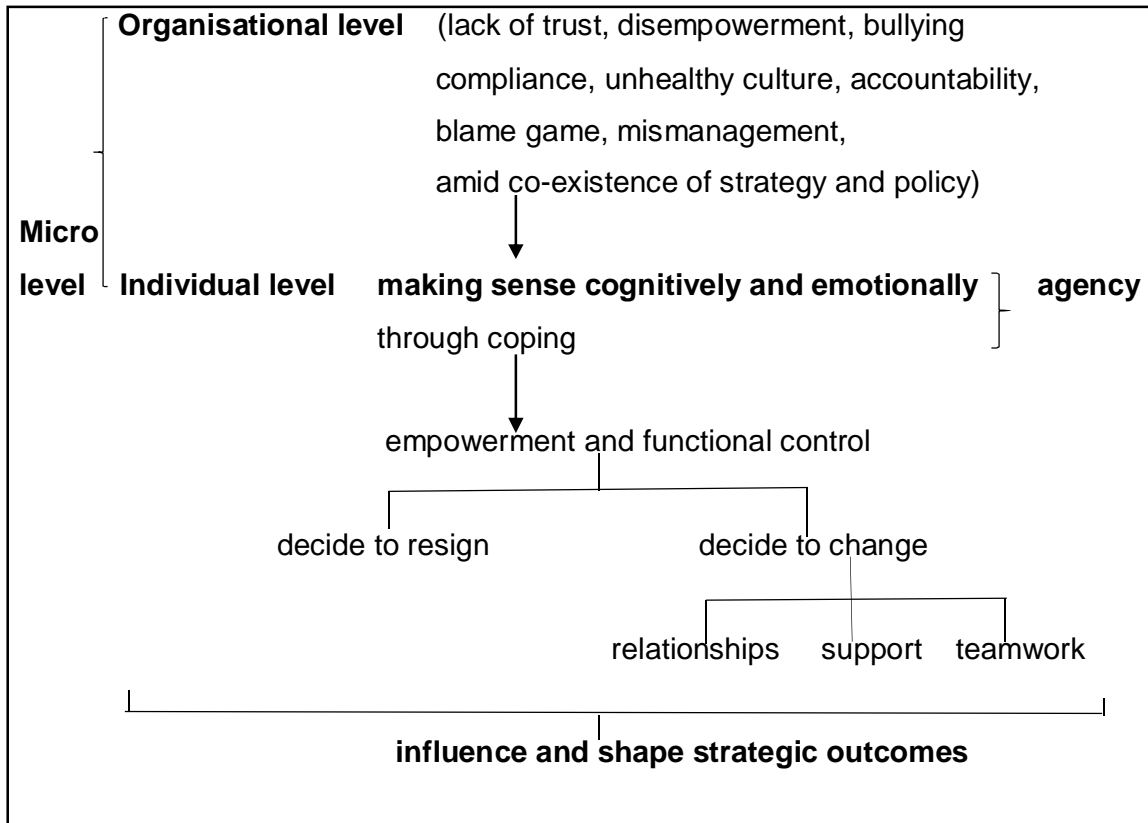
The finding is that the agency, or embodied sense-making (Thompson & Stapleton, 2009; Colville *et al.*, 2016), of the participants encompasses empowering themselves to make decisions about their functional roles, and their ability to support and co-operate with each other (Lumby, 2003) when their workloads became too much to bear. Their agency was a conscious decision (Chia & Mackay, 2007) to assume power within a disempowering organisational social structure. The 'invisible workers' (Szekeres, 2004) were invisible no more. They had stepped into their light and assumed agency through their micro-strategising practices of sense-making to bring stability and sustainability into their lived organisational social reality. Their reflection on their practice has given them the ability to change situations through their agency and sense-making.

5.6.4. Summary of abstraction

The primary and secondary research questions have been interpreted and abstracted. I have divided the five main themes into two groups, namely, the organisation and the individual in the organisation. Inconsistent communication, and an organisational culture of power (Lukes, 2005) and bullying (Keashly & Neuman, 2010) have become the daily dysfunctional organisational reality for the participants over time. The struggle to comprehend the organisational change (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011) and the significance of it in their daily organisational experience take its emotional toll on the participants, and their families (Ilies *et al.*, 2009). Organisational contradictions are revealed by recognising inconsistencies, and enablers (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007), (refer sections 5.5 and 5.6) within the organisational socio-cultural reality within a dynamic contemporary context. Cognitive and emotional sense-making are the lenses that participants use to view organisational change (Thompson & Stapleton, 2009). Through recognition and acknowledgement of contradiction in their organisational reality (Tretheway & Ashcraft, 2004), participants are able to make retrospective sense (Colville *et al.*, 2016) of this reality. Their micro-strategising practices of empowerment, teamwork and support of each other enables them to realise a prospective (Colville *et al.*, 2016) organisational reality where they assume agency, or embodied sense-making (Thompson & Stapleton, 2009; Colville *et al.*, 2016), through functional control (Chia & Mackay, 2007) and practical coping (Chia & Holt, 2006; Segal, 2010).

Figure 5.7 below conceptually illustrates organisational contradictions, and enablers, in an effort to move towards organisational stability and equilibrium (Weick *et al.*, 2005). The figure shows how the micro-strategising practices of the participants evolve to show how the practical coping of agency and sense-making happens and enable survival within a contradictory organisational space to ultimately influence the shaping of strategic outcomes.

Figure 5.7: Visual conception of abstraction of how middle managers shape strategic outcomes



(source: own compilation, 2018)

The visual conception in Figure 5.7 above illustrates the embedded inconsistencies uncovered in the practices of senior management in the organisation and that of middle managers in the operations division. The visual illustration interprets the five themes of this current study to answer the research questions on a higher level of abstraction than just listing the findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

5.7. Contributions of the current study

The following section proceeds to elucidate the contributions of the current study to the body of knowledge regarding the theoretical areas and gaps with their concomitant assumptions.

5.7.1. Strategy-as-practice perspective and Weickian sense-making

I positioned this current study in the body of knowledge of strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012) and sense-making (Weick *et al.*, 2005) (refer Chapter 3 section 3.8 Figure 3.3) to humanise management in relation to strategy (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009) (refer Chapter 3 section 3.8 Figure 3.3). The following section elucidates this modest contribution of this current study to the body of knowledge.

5.7.1.1. Strategy-as-practice perspective

The current study focused on the theoretical area of humanising management by exploring the lived, daily organisational experience of the practitioner within an organisational social structure (refer Chapter 3 section 3.8 Figure 3.3). In heeding the call of strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012) and SAPP (Burgelman *et al.*, 2018) to link the micro-practices of practitioners to the organisational social structure, the current study responds to this ongoing theoretical gap between the micro-practices of the practitioner and the organisational social structure. The current study links the micro-practice of agency (Vaara & Whittington, 2012) and sense-making (Weick *et al.*, 2005) with the organisational social structure over time as its modest contribution to the body of knowledge (refer Chapter 3 section 3.8 Figure 3.3).

The ongoing theoretical gap which this current study explored was the micro-practices of the middle manager (Floyd, 2016) as agent to affect change. The current study focused on administrative middle managers as active agents in shaping the understanding and interpretation of strategy within an organisational social context (Floyd, 2016). The current study found that, even though organisational contradictions provided a constraining organisational social context for administrative middle managers to assume agency to shape strategy, they were able to rise above adversity through functional control (Chia & Mackay, 2007) and practical coping (Chia & Holt, 2006).

5.7.1.2. Weickian sense-making

The empirical focus of the current study was middle managers' sense-making of strategic change from a Weickian perspective (Weick *et al.*, 2005). The current study explored the ongoing theoretical gap in the body of knowledge of whether middle manager sense-making could influence the shaping of strategy within an organisational social structure (refer Chapter 3 section 3.8 Figure 3.3 and Table 3.1). The assumption is that a constitutive relationship exists between the organisational social structure and the micro-strategising practices of sense-making (and agency) of the practitioner which allows for a reciprocal influence (Weick *et al.*, 2005) (refer Chapter 3 section 3.8 Figure 3.3). The current study found that administrative middle managers were able to recognise that the integration of work and family life was not possible for them emotionally due to their adverse working conditions (Ilies *et al.*, 2009), and that individual and communal sense is enabled and constituted socially and relationally in an organisational space.

The modest contribution of this current study focused on sense-making and the organisational social structure and to what extent they were constitutive of each other (Weick *et al.*, 2005). The finding was that the sense-making practices of the practitioners socially constructed the organisational social structure retrospectively (Colville *et al.*, 2016) on a cognitive and emotional level (Thompson & Stapleton, 2009) in an effort towards sustainability and equilibrium (Weick *et al.*, 2005) prospectively (Colville *et al.*, 2016).

5.7.2. Middle managers

The empirical focus of the current study was middle managers (Floyd, 2016; Burgelman *et al.*, 2018) as practitioners or agents of change. The current study explored the ongoing theoretical gap in the body of knowledge of whether practitioners have the potential to shape strategy by reflecting on their daily micro-strategising practice (refer Chapter 3 section 3.8 Figure 3.3 and Table 3.1). The assumption within the body of knowledge is that practitioners make sense of their lived organisational

social experience through story-telling as a sense-making practice (refer Chapter 3 section 3.8 Figure 3.3).

The contribution of this current study relates to the exploration of the applied gap of administrative middle managers at a for-profit educational brand of a PHE provider (refer Chapter 3 section 3.8 Table 3.1) as opposed to academic middle managers (Meek *et al.*, 2010), or top management (Burgelman *et al.*, 2018), at a public HE provider. Academic middle managers in public universities function at the inter-face between the public university's central administration and the faculties and departments where research is done. Administrative middle managers in public universities have two vice-presidents who are responsible for academic policy and, financial and operational policy issues respectively (Meek *et al.*, 2010). Administrative middle managers at an educational brand of a PHE in this current study make retrospective and prospective sense (Colville *et al.*, 2016) of their lived organisational social experience through reflective awareness over time. Middle managers and their story-telling have the ability to influence and shape strategy.

5.7.3. Agency

The current study explored the ongoing theoretical area in the body of knowledge of whether practitioners as agents have the ability to shape strategy by reflecting on their daily micro-strategising practice (refer Chapter 3 section 3.8 Table 3.1). The assumption within the body of knowledge is that practitioners make sense of their lived organisational social experience through story-telling as a sense-making practice (refer Chapter 3 section 3.8 Figure 3.3).

The modest contribution of the current study was that even though the practitioners were perceived to be 'invisible' (Dobson, 2000: 203), they had the ability, through their micro-strategising practices of agency (Vaara & Whittington, 2012) of embodied sense-making (Thompson & Stapleton, 2009; Colville *et al.*, 2016) through practical coping (Chia & Holt, 2006), and empowerment through functional control (Chia & Mackay, 2007) to influence and shape strategic outcomes (refer Figure 5.7). The intermediate embeddedness of the practitioner within the organisational social

structure (Mantere, 2008; Vaara & Whittington, 2012) enabled their micro-strategising practices.

The finding was that the participants assumed agency (Vaara & Whittington, 2012) through embodied sense-making (Thompson & Stapleton, 2009; Colville *et al.*, 2016), practical coping (Chia & Holt, 2006), and empowerment (Chia & Mackay, 2007) to influence and shape strategic outcomes by actively recognising and accepting organisational complexity within a constraining organisational social context.

5.7.4. Methodological contribution

The assumption within the body of knowledge is that story-telling, as a sense-making practice, has the ability to shape strategy (refer Chapter 3 section 3.8 Figure 3.3). A further assumption within the body of knowledge is that practitioners make sense of their lived organisational social experience through story-telling as a micro-strategising sense-making practice (Colville *et al.*, 2016) (refer Chapter 3 section 3.8 Figure 3.3).

Through story-telling by practitioners, this current study aimed to modestly contribute to the body of knowledge on data gathering through CMC technology (Salmons, 2016). I used a research design of nano narratives (Williamson, 2016: 863) or text messages and e-mail journals (Jones & Woolley, 2015) (refer Chapter 4 section 4.7.1. and 4.7.2) as an emergent method in data gathering to uncover individual reflective perceptions on sense-making within a lived organisational social context over time. Through this research design, practice becomes reflexive for the practitioner as they step back from their routine micro-strategising practices to critically contemplate their logic of practice (Colville *et al.*, 2016) from an individual and organisational perspective (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011).

5.7.5. Statement of contribution of current study

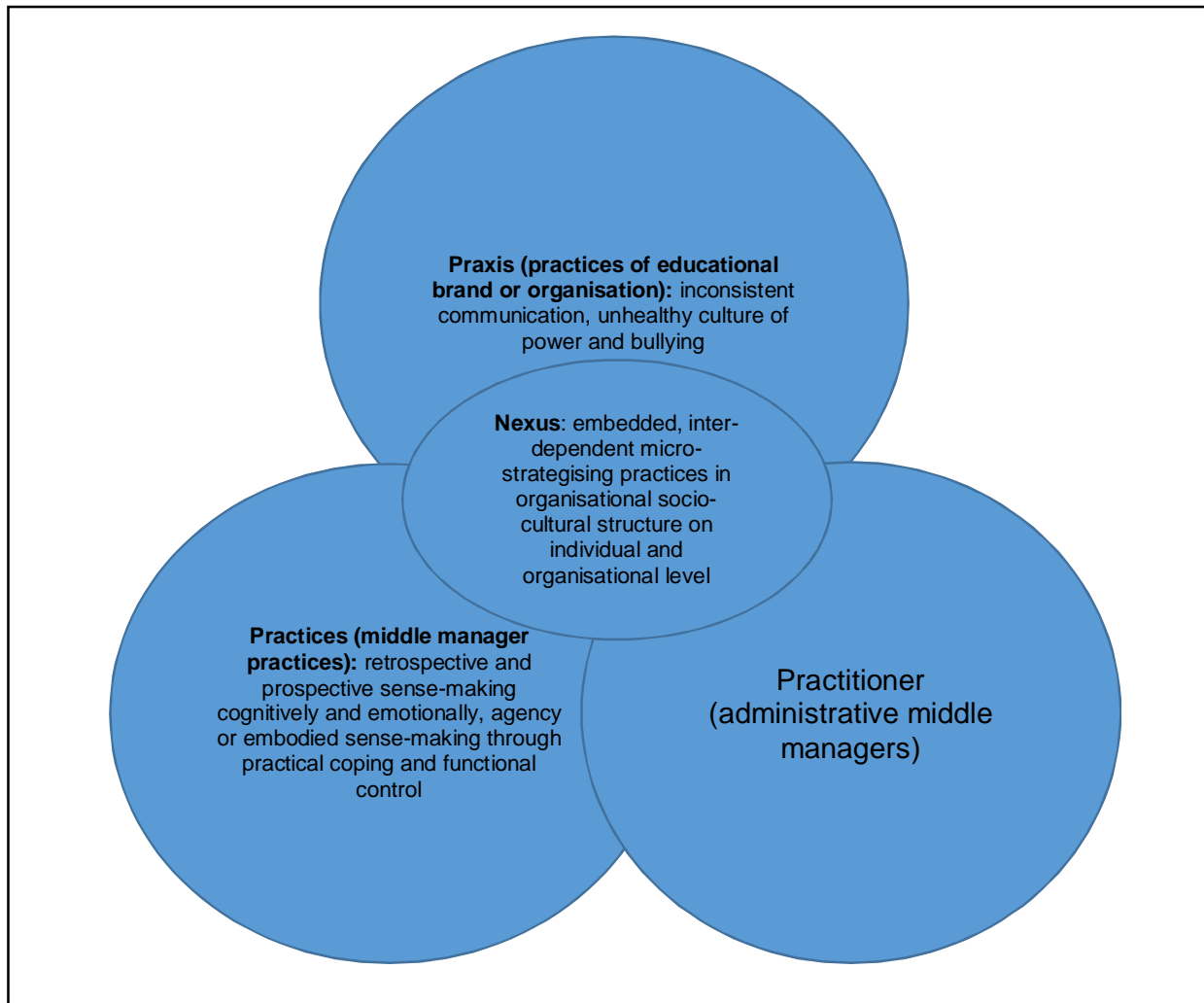
The current study has made a modest contribution to the body of knowledge in its exploration of the micro-strategising practices of administrative middle managers in an organisational social structure from their lived organisational social experience over

time. The finding was that middle managers used micro-strategising practices of cognitive and emotional sense-making (Thompson & Stapleton, 2009) retrospectively and prospectively (Colville *et al.*, 2016) and embodied sense-making (Thompson & Stapleton, 2009; Colville *et al.*, 2016, or agency (Vaara & Whittington, 2012), to navigate a contradictory, disempowering organisational socio-cultural context that is both enabling and constraining (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007).

It is also to be noted that there is a porous inter-dependency between the two discrete levels of organisation and individual. The inter-dependency has been identified through the 'dotted-line relationships' within the graphics (refer Chapter 5 Figure 5.6). The inter-dependency has been interpreted through the inconsistent embedded practices following the numerous references to the equivocal signals that the two main levels demonstrate (refer Chapter 5 section 5.5). Embedded practices inevitably create an inter-woven entity where the strands of individual and organisational action are difficult to pull out and name distinctly without unravelling the tapestry of the organisational socio-cultural context (Vaara & Durand, 2012; Feldman & Worline, 2016). These findings affirm the intellectual puzzle which sought to understand and/or restore the balance of the individual within an organisational social context to attain organisational security and equilibrium after organisational change (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011). Through an emergent research design of text messages and e-mail journals (Salmons, 2016; Jones & Woolley, 2015; Filep *et al.*, 2017) through story-telling over time, these embedded practices were revealed in the data.

Figure 5.8 below visually conceptualises the modest contribution of the current study in relation to the strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012) and Weickian sense-making (Weick *et al.*, 2005) perspectives.

Figure 5.8: Confluence of theoretical perspectives in relation to the body of knowledge



(source: own compilation with acknowledgement to scholars of theoretical perspectives, 2018)

Figure 5.8 provides a visual confluence of the theoretical perspectives in relation to the body of knowledge.

5.8. Chapter conclusion

This chapter presented the five main findings of the current study from five identified themes. Each of the five findings was converted into five finding statements to present

an inductive and deductive analysis and abstraction/interpretation of the qualitative data. The abstraction of the current study's findings resulted in the struggle towards equilibrium for both the individual and the organisation being illustrated conceptually. The next chapter will draw conclusions based on the findings and make recommendations for future research endeavours.

Chapter 6: Research contributions, conclusions and recommendations

The pages are a trail of breadcrumbs leading through a dark forest to now.

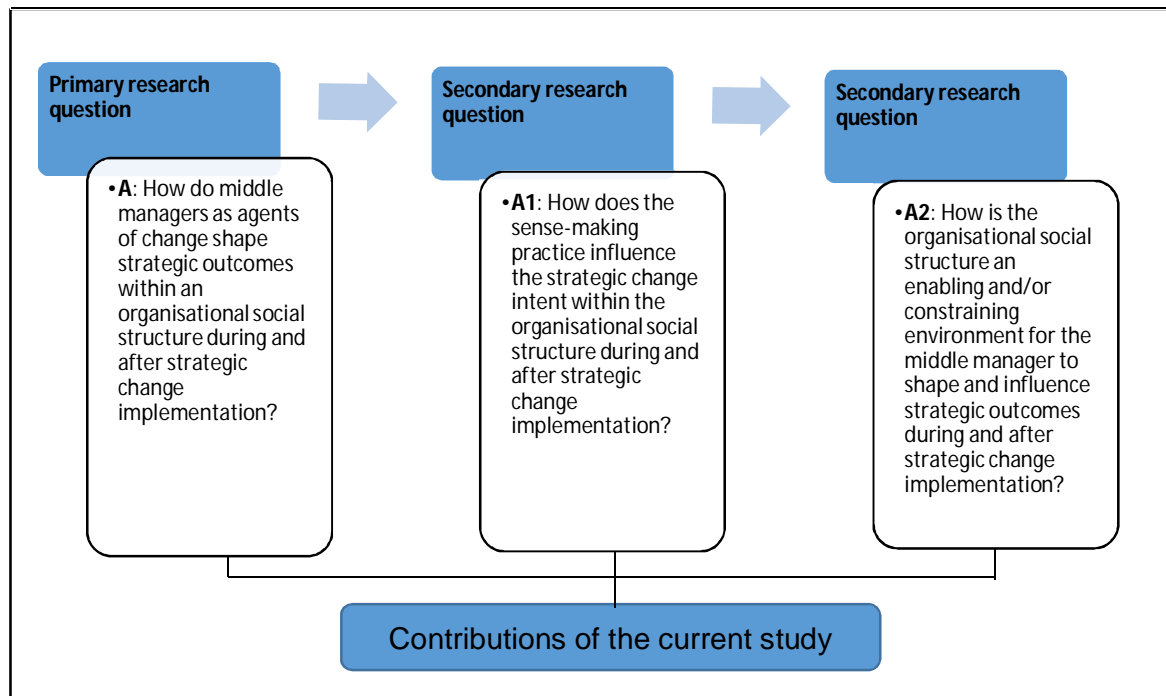
– Darrel Bristow - Bovey

6.1. Introduction

The purpose of this current intrinsic case study was to explore how the shaping of strategic outcomes by middle managers suggested agency and sense-making practice within an enabling and/or constraining organisational social structure after strategic change implementation. This current study explored micro-level strategising from a middle management perspective at an educational brand of a PHE provider during times of change and reorientation of working practices. The intention was to contribute to research from a strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012) and Weickian sense-making (Weick *et al.*, 2005) perspective by humanising management. The current study focuses on the administrative middle manager through individualised, reflective story-telling (Fenton & Langley, 2011) from a lived organisational social experience.

This current qualitative, interpretive, single-case study drew on primary sources of data which were generated through a single, open-ended, structured, asynchronous question using text messages (refer Annexure 12) and e-mail journals (refer Annexure 13) in two phases of data gathering for internal validity (Barbour, 2001). Participants in the current study were seven middle managers in the operations division of the educational brand. The current study was based on the following primary and secondary research questions as depicted in Figure 6.1 below:

Figure 6.1: Revisiting the research questions



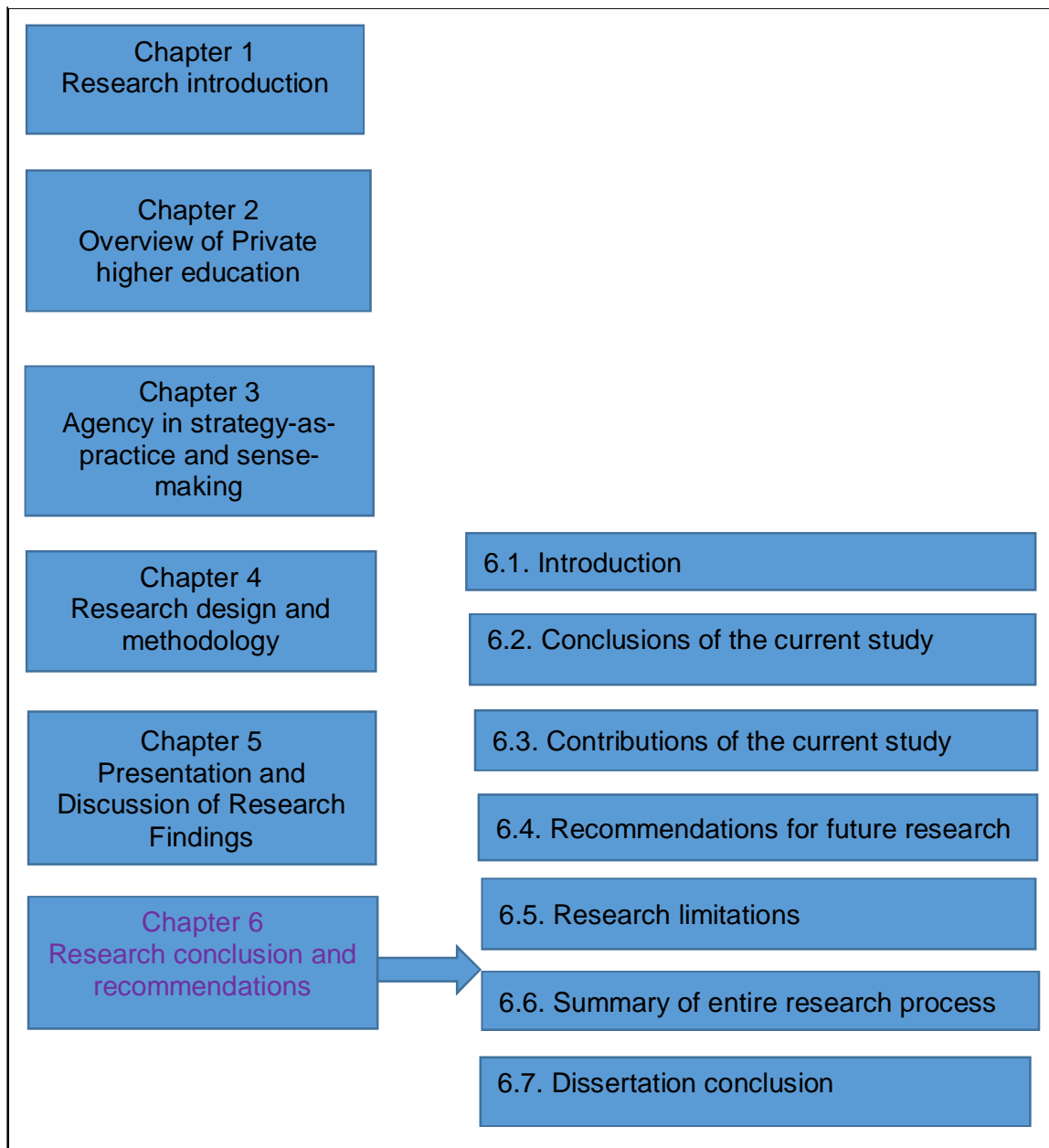
(source: own compilation, 2018)

Chapter 5 presented the findings that related to the research questions. In so doing, Chapter 5 revealed the 'story' of the data through the reflections of the participants. The data was coded, organised and analysed through inter-coder analysis of data using an inductive and deductive constructionist form of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) into 5 themes (refer Chapter 5 section 5.1.1.6 Figure 5.3). This chapter, Chapter 6, draws conclusions and makes recommendations from the abstraction presented in Chapter 5 in relation to the primary and secondary research questions of the current study. Each research question is answered separately, first the two secondary research questions, then the primary research question.

Chapter 6 in relation to the research process

Figure 6.2 shows Chapter 6 in relation to the research process

Figure 6.2: Structure of Chapter 6

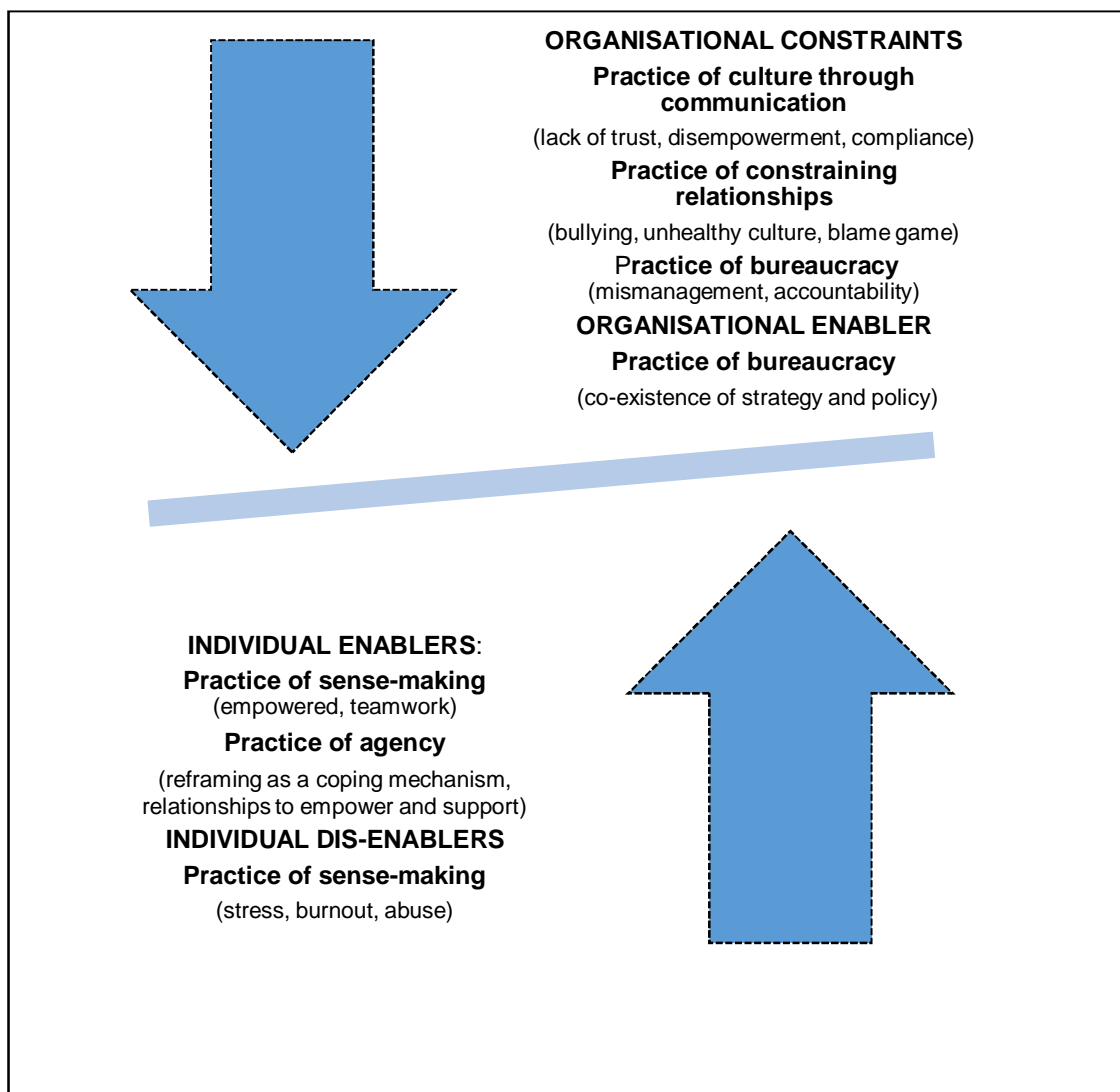


(source: own compilation, 2018)

6.2. Conclusions of the current study

The following Figure 6.3 presents a conceptual abstraction of the five main themes (refer Chapter 5 sections 5.5 and 5.6) in relation to the organisational constraints and individual enablers and dis-enablers. How they relate to the primary and secondary research questions of the current study is thus presented at a higher-order interpretation in Figure 6.3.

Figure 6.3: Conceptual abstraction of five main themes: organisational and individual enablers and dis-enablers



(source: own compilation, 2018)

The following section draws conclusions from the findings identified in Chapter 5 in relation to the primary and secondary research questions (refer Chapter 1) of the current study. Each research question is answered separately, first the two secondary research questions, then the primary research question.

6.2.1. Secondary research question A2

How is the organisational social structure an enabling and/or constraining environment for the middle manager to shape and influence strategic outcomes?’

6.2.1.1. Conclusion to Theme 1: Culture through communication

This section draws conclusions about the secondary research question A2 in relation to the theme of culture through communication.

I have come to the conclusion that there was an organisational culture of inconsistent communication by senior management (Clegg *et al.*, 2002).

6.2.1.2. Conclusion to Theme 2: Constraining relationships

This section draws conclusions about the secondary research question A2 in relation to the theme of constraining relationships.

I have come to the conclusion that there was an unhealthy organisational culture of power and bullying (Keashly & Neuman, 2010) by senior management.

6.2.1.3. Conclusion to Theme 3: Bureaucracy

This section draws conclusions about the secondary research question A2 in relation to the theme of bureaucracy.

I have come to the conclusion that the disruption in organisational practices (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011) facilitated inconsistent work practices and unclear role definitions (Lumby, 2003) which lead to a contradictory, complex (Tretheway & Ashcraft, 2004) and constraining organisational context.

I have drawn conclusions about the secondary research question A2 of this current study.

6.2.2. Secondary research question A1

How does the sense-making practice influence the strategic change intent within the organisational social structure?

6.2.2.1. Conclusion to Theme 4: Sense-making

This section draws conclusions about the secondary research question A1 in relation to the theme of sense-making.

I have come to the conclusion that the practice of sense-making is socially constructed retrospectively and prospectively (Colville *et al.*, 2016), and that sense-making occurs on a cognitive (Floyd, 2016) and an emotional level (Ilies *et al.*, 2009; Thompson & Stapleton, 2009). By participants' attaching meaning to actions within an organisational socio-cultural structure, sense is created for themselves and others which allows for organisational security and sustainability (Weick *et al.*, 2005; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007).

I have drawn conclusions about the secondary research question A1 of this current study.

6.2.3. Primary research question A

How do middle managers as agents of change shape strategic outcomes within an organisational social structure?

6.2.3.1. Conclusion to Theme 5: Agency

This section draws conclusions about the secondary research question A in relation to the theme of agency.

I have come to the conclusion that the participants reframed (Colville *et al.*, 2016) the dysfunctional organisational context through embodied sense-making (Thompson & Stapleton, 2009; Colville *et al.*, 2016) or agency (Vaara & Whittington, 2012) of practical coping (Chia & Holt, 2006) and functional control (Chia & Mackay, 2007) to rise above organisational complexity and contradiction (Tretheway & Ashcraft, 2004) and move towards unleashing their potential.

I have drawn conclusions about the primary research question A of this current study.

6.2.4. Research conclusion

Based on the conclusions presented above, the summative assertions are the following: Middle managers are able to shape strategic outcomes through retrospective and prospective sense-making (Colville *et al.*, 2016). Middle managers are able to shape strategic outcomes through practical coping (Chia & Holt, 2006) and functional control (Chia & Mackay, 2007) of embodied sense-making (Thompson & Stapleton, 2009; Colville *et al.*, 2016) or agency (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). These embedded micro-strategising practices by middle managers are strategic responses during and after strategic change implementation within an enabling and/or constraining (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007) organisational socio-cultural structure.

The concept of the organisationally-wrought balance of discretely presented realities of the individual and organisation is the main interpretive contribution of the current study. The conclusions presented above (refer section 6.2) report on the significance of having insight into, and restoring balance for, the individual in his/her daily organisational social experience and the organisation. The conclusions also show the inter-dependencies of individual and organisation (dotted lines in Chapter 5 Figure 5.4 and section 6.2 Figure 6.3) for organisational sustainability through a porous osmosis of inter-relationality (Vaara & Durand, 2012; Feldman & Worline, 2016). These findings affirm the intellectual puzzle which sought to understand and/or restore the balance of the individual within an organisational social context to attain organisational security and equilibrium after organisational change (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011).

These conclusive statements are provided at the level of preparing for the recommendations from a strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012) and Weickian sense-making (Weick *et al.*, 2005) perspective.

6.2.4.1. Strategy-as-practice perspective

The over-arching conclusion is supported by the following assertions as it pertains to the **organisation from a strategy-as-practice perspective** (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012):

6.2.4.1.a. The constraining organisational social structure is characterised by an organisational culture of inconsistent communication practices (Clegg *et al.*, 2002) by senior management and the oppositional need by the participants for consistent communication practices. These inconsistent communication practices created confusion for the participants.

6.2.4.1.b. The constraining organisational social structure is characterised by a consistent organisational culture of power (Lukes, 2005) and bullying (Keashly & Neuman, 2010) by senior management and the denial thereof. The participants recognised the cognitive complexity of oppositional needs within the contradictory organisational context (Tretheway & Ashcraft, 2004).

6.2.4.1.c. The constraining organisational social structure is characterised by organisational disruption (Chia & Mackay, 2007) which creates frustration as there was no strategic realignment from senior management to navigate daily organisational life in the face of change and reorientation over time.

6.2.4.2. Weickian sense-making

The over-arching conclusion is supported by the following assertions as it pertains to the **individual from a Weickian sense-making (Weick *et al.*, 2005) perspective**:

6.2.4.2.a. Retrospective sense-making (Colville *et al.*, 2016) is socially constructed and occurs on a cognitive (Floyd, 2016) and an emotional (Ilies *et al.*, 2009; Thompson & Stapleton, 2009) level through meaning construction of actions towards prospective sense-making (Colville *et al.*, 2016) within the organisational social structure to achieve stability and equilibrium (Weick *et al.*, 2005).

The over-arching conclusion is supported by the following assertions as it pertains to the **individual from a Weickian sense-making (Weick *et al.*, 2005) perspective with regard to agency (Vaara & Whittington, 2012)**:

6.2.4.2.b. The middle managers assume embodied sense-making (Maitlis *et al.*, 2013; Colville *et al.*, 2016) or agency (Vaara & Whittington, 2012) through practical coping (Chia & Holt, 2006) and functional control (Chia & Mackay, 2007) within a constraining organisational socio-cultural context to respond strategically to organisational complexity and contradiction (Tretheway & Ashcraft, 2004). Middle managers appear to be able to rise above organisational constraints and realise their potential through individual and collective micro-strategising practices.

Following on from the above, this current study concludes that the abstraction of the findings from strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2012) and Weickian sense-making (Weick *et al.*, 2005) perspectives was useful in understanding the contradictory micro-strategising practices and complex relationship between the individual (and the team) and the organisation. In seeking to mitigate organisational

contradictions (Tretheway & Ashcraft, 2004) and move towards equilibrium and sustainability (Weick *et al.*, 2005), a conscious, strategic response of micro-strategising practices of retrospective and prospective sense-making (Colville *et al.*, 2016), on a cognitive (Floyd, 2016) and emotional level (Ilies *et al.*, 2009, Thompson & Stapleton, 2009), and embodied sense-making (Maitlis *et al.*, 2013; Colville *et al.*, 2016) or agency (Vaara & Whittington, 2012) through practical coping (Chia & Holt, 2006) and functional control (Chia & Mackay, 2007), through individual reflective storytelling (Fenton & Langlely, 2011), was revealed.

It is also to be noted that there is a porous inter-dependency between the two main levels of organisation and individual. The inter-dependency has been identified through the 'dotted-line relationships' within the graphics (refer Chapter 5 Figure 5.6). The inter-dependency has been interpreted through the contradictions following the numerous references to the equivocal signals that the two discrete entities demonstrate (refer Chapter 5 section 5.5). Embedded practices inevitably create an inter-woven entity where the strands of individual and organisational action are difficult to pull out and name distinctly without unravelling the organisational socio-cultural tapestry (Vaara & Durand, 2012; Feldman & Worline, 2016) that is the organisational reality. These conclusions affirm the intellectual puzzle which sought to understand and/or restore the balance of the individual within an organisational socio-cultural context to attain organisational security and equilibrium after organisational change (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011).

6.3. Contribution of the current study

The current study has made the following modest contributions to the body of knowledge.

6.3.1. Summary of contribution of current study

Table 6.1 summarises the contribution of the current study in relation to the theoretical perspectives and the body of knowledge.

Table 6.1: Summary of modest contribution of current study

| Practitioner | Practice | Praxis | Nexus: embedded, inter-dependent micro-strategising practices in organisational socio-cultural structure on individual and organisational level (refer Chapter 5 Figure 5.8) |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Administrative middle manager | Practice of administrative middle manager as practitioner: retrospective and prospective sense-making (Colville <i>et al.</i> , 2016) on a cognitive (Floyd, 2016) and emotional level (Ilies <i>et al.</i> , 2009) | Practice by educational brand as organisation: inconsistent communication (Clegg <i>et al.</i> , 2002); contradictory (Tretheway & Ashcraft, 2004), complex culture of power (Lukes, 2005) and bullying (Keashly & Neuman, 2010) | porous inter-dependency between the two discrete levels of organisation and individual creates inter-woven entity where the strands of individual and organisational practices are difficult to name distinctly, without unravelling the tapestry that is the organisational socio-cultural entity (Vaara & Durand, 2012; Feldman & Worline, 2016). |
| | Practice of administrative middle manager as practitioner: agency (Vaara & Whittington, 2012) or embodied sense-making (Colville <i>et al.</i> , 2016) through practical coping (Chia & Holt, 2006) and functional control (Chia & Mackay, 2007) | | |

(source: own compilation, 2018)

6.3.2. Methodological contribution

The modest, emergent research design of text messages and e-mail journals (Salmons, 2016) allowed rich reflection by the administrative middle managers on their micro-strategising practices in their organisational socio-cultural context.

6.3.3. Statement of contribution of the current study

The current study has made a modest contribution to the body of knowledge in its exploration of the micro-level strategising practices of administrative middle managers in a for-profit educational brand of a PHE provider from their lived organisational social experience over four months. The conclusion was that middle managers used micro-level strategising practices of retrospective and prospective cognitive and emotional sense-making (Thompson & Stapleton, 2009; Colville *et al.*, 2016) and the practical coping (Chia & Holt, 2006) of agency (Vaara & Whittington, 2012), or embodied sense-making (Thompson & Stapleton, 2009; Colville *et al.*, 2016) to navigate a complex and contradictory (Tretheway & Ashcraft, 2004) organisational socio-cultural context that is both enabling and constraining (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007).

A further contribution of the current study speaks to the embedded practices between the two levels of organisation and individual, which has been interpreted through the inconsistent embedded practices following the equivocal signals that these two main levels demonstrate (refer Chapter 5 Figure 5.6). The porous inter-dependency between the two discrete levels of organisation and individual creates an inter-woven entity where the strands of individual and organisational action are difficult to pull out and name distinctly, without unravelling the tapestry that is the organisational socio-cultural entity (Vaara & Durand, 2012; Feldman & Worline, 2016). These contributions affirm the intellectual puzzle which sought to understand and/or restore the balance of the individual within an organisational socio-cultural context to attain organisational security and equilibrium after organisational change (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011).

I was able to reach this conclusion through an emergent research design of text messages and e-mails (Salmons, 2016) over time.

6.4. Recommendations for future research

This dissertation will now proceed to make recommendations based on the conclusions of the research.

Further research may consider:

- studying administrative middle managers in other contexts, both public and/or private educational brands, to identify similarities or differences across various contexts, in response to Meek *et al.* (2010), Bhayat (2012) and Burgelman *et al.* (2018).
- engaging in more phenomenological approaches which explore micro-level sense-making from a cognitive and emotional perspective and how these influence middle manager strategising, in response to Burgelman *et al.* (2018).
- engaging in more phenomenological approaches which explore micro-level sense-making from a retrospective and prospective sense-making perspective and how these influence middle manager strategising, in response to Burgelman *et al.* (2018).
- engaging in more phenomenological approaches which explore micro-level actors and practical coping of agency through embodied sense-making within level structures and systems and how these influence their strategising, in response to Burgelman *et al.* (2018).
- engaging in more phenomenological approaches which explore organisational becoming by actors and agency through cognitive and emotional sense-making, in response to Burgelman *et al.* (2018).

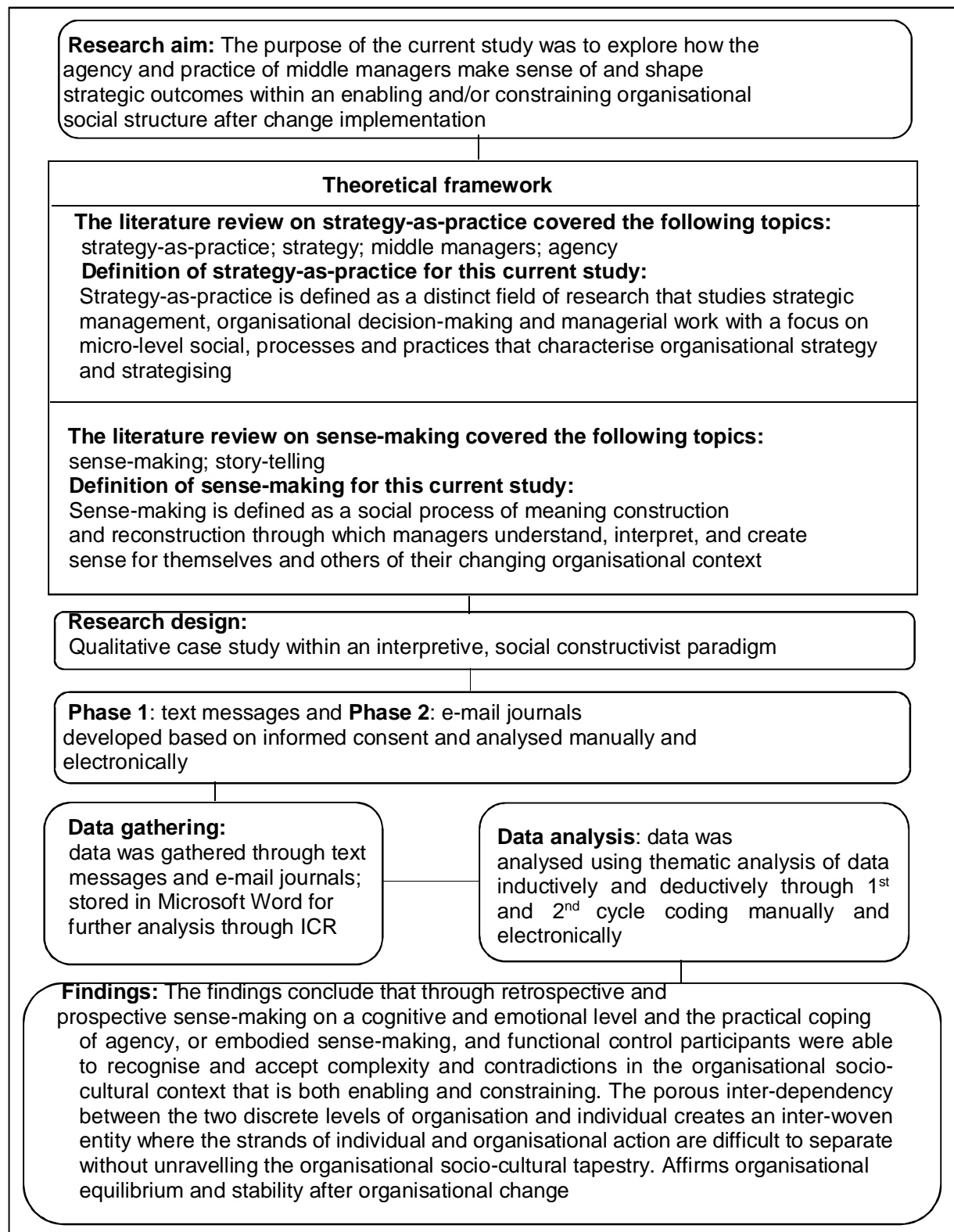
6.5. Research limitations

The dissertation was subject to some limitations. Firstly, the current study was qualitative which limited data gathering to a small sample of seven participants. As such, cause-and-effect relationships and generalisations could not be drawn from the findings and conclusions of the current study. Secondly, as an intrinsic, single-case study of an educational brand of a PHE provider, this current study did not extend to other educational brands within the stable of the PHE provider. A further limitation could be that the brevity of the text messages placed restrictions on the amount of words participants used to express themselves. The strength of the text message also became its weakness.

6.6. Summary of entire research process

The following diagram in Figure 6.4 shows the research process and the overall contribution made by the current study.

Figure 6.4: Conceptual synopsis of entire research process.



(source: own compilation, 2018)

6.7. Dissertation conclusion

This current study explored micro-level strategising at an educational brand of a PHE provider during times of change and reorientation. The current study adopted a qualitative, intrinsic, single-case study using strategy-as-practice and Weickian sense-making as theoretical frameworks. The qualitative approach was suited to the explorative nature of the research, which sought to explore micro-level strategising within an organisational social context from a lived perspective over time. The current study answered the research questions and found that, through retrospective and prospective cognitive and emotional sense-making and the practical coping of agency, or embodied sense-making, and functional control, participants were able to recognise and accept complexity and contradictions in the organisational socio-cultural context that are both enabling and constraining.

A further conclusion of the current study speaks to the embedded practices between the two levels of organisation and individual, which has been interpreted through the inconsistent embedded practices following the equivocal signals that these two main levels demonstrate. The porous inter-dependency between the two discrete levels of organisation and individual creates an inter-woven entity where the strands of individual and organisational action are difficult to pull out and name distinctly, without unravelling the tapestry that is the organisational socio-cultural entity. These contributions affirm the intellectual puzzle which sought to understand and/or restore the balance of the individual within an organisational socio-cultural context to attain organisational security and equilibrium after organisational change.

6.8. Concluding reflection

It is 01h04 in the morning. This journey has been long and arduous. The journey that I had embarked on three years ago has left me confused sometimes, yet exhilarated at the same time. Looking into the scholarly space of the theoretical lenses left me feeling like an academic dwarf among giants. I would like to believe that I have grown through this sociological journey of discovery, and that I might not be as bewildered by its lexicon as I used to be. I have been humbled by the trust that the participants

have shown in me to spotlight their daily plight, but also by their triumphant resilient action in mitigating those adversities. It is a journey that I would like to continue.

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Annexure 1: Interview Schedule

Data Gathering Schedule provided by:

Shereen Judith Samson, Masters candidate: School of Economic and Management Sciences, UNISA

Research question:

The research question is: "Shaping strategy through agency and sense-making – a case study of a private higher education institution."

Dear Participant

Thank you for providing the time for this conversation. The Data Gathering schedule is defined as follows:

First, the researcher outlining the participant's role in Phase 1 of the study:

The researcher will hold a 30-minute conversation with the individual participant to provide information which fully explains the study and a full discussion of informed consent, with the informed consent being signed off, if the participant consents. Thereafter, the researcher will hold an initial conversation, which will be audio-recorded, with each individual participant to share the purpose of the study. The audio-recording is for the protection of the participant and the researcher, but the data will not be used for the study.

Second, reading of the paragraphs about strategy as practice (and explanation, as needed) for the preliminary briefing session:

From: Strategy at the Leading Edge: *Long Range Planning*, 29(5): 1996.

Strategy as Practice: Richard Whittington.

"Thus the practice perspective is concerned with management activity, how managers 'do strategy'. There are inspirational parts to doing strategy – the getting of ideas, the spotting of opportunities, the grasping of situations. But there is also the perspiration – the routines of budgeting and planning as they unwind over the year, the sitting in expenditure and strategy committees, the writing of formal documents, the making of presentations. Practice is concerned with the work of strategising – all the meetings, the talking, the form filling and the number crunching by which strategy gets formulated and implemented. Getting things done involves the nitty-gritty, often tiresome and repetitive routines of strategy" (Whittington, 1996: 731).

Third, asking any questions or points of clarity to conclude the preliminary briefing session

such as: "Do you have any comments on, or ideas, about this research study?" (Williamson, 2013) to prompt reflection on the study by the participants.

Fourth, to commence phase 1, after the preliminary briefing session and in your own time, in response to the invitation of the researcher, providing a summary of strategic practice as you experience it at the brand of the PHE provider in a short text message, such as:

“In a text message on your smartphone, how would you best describe strategy in practice as experienced by you on a daily basis? Start your descriptive short text message using these words: “I would best describe the educational brand’s strategic practice as” (adapted from Williamson, 2013).

Fifth, to commence phase 2, after the preliminary briefing session and after phase 1, in your own time, in response to the invitation of the researcher, the researcher outlining the participant’s role in Phase 2 of the study:

The researcher will email the same, single, structured, asynchronous question that the participant would have to respond to via e-mail journal every time over the four-month period (a maximum of seven times), namely:

“Tell me a story about your experience and involvement in the operations division and the significance of that experience and involvement for you on a daily basis.”

The data would be gathered seven times via e-mail journals across a time period of four months as outlined in the table that follows:

Data gathering across eight time periods over four months

| Time period 1 | Time period 2 | Time period 3 | Time period 4 | Time period 5 | Time period 6 | Time period 7 | Time period 8 |
|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| February 2017 | February 2017 | March 2017 | March 2017 | April 2017 | April 2017 | May 2017 | May 2017 |
| Every fortnight (once) | Every fortnight (once) | Every fortnight (once) | Every fortnight (once) | Every fortnight (once) | Every fortnight (once) | Every fortnight (once) | Every fortnight (once) |

(source: own compilation)

The researcher would maintain contact through unstructured prompts with the participants via email to ensure that he/she is making his/her e-mail journal entries timeously and to encourage and motivate participants: “Your emailed response is due soon. Don’t forget to write and send your thoughts and reflections to me. Your response has been greatly valued thus far. Thanks.”

Thank you
Shereen J Samson

Annexure 2: Informed consent form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation, and has informed me about Unisa's Ethic Research policy and informed consent.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable). I am aware that the findings of this study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings.

I agree to the recording of the initial discussion on the purpose of the study and the summary of strategy as practice via text message in the first phase, and the subsequent reflections on daily strategic practice via online journal in the second phase.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Full Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Full Name of Researcher: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Annexure 3: Ethical clearance from educational brand of PHE provider

Annexure C1b - Ethical Clearance Committee Outcome v1



ETHICAL CLEARANCE OUTCOME COMMITTEE FINDINGS

The Ethics Committee [REDACTED] has evaluated your proposed research based on the information provided and your institutional approval. This approval is based on the assumption that the information you have provided is true and factually correct. The outcome is as follows:

1. Identifying information

| | |
|---|---------------------------|
| Name: | Shereen Judith |
| Surname: | Samson |
| Student number: | 05622026 |
| Institution where registered: | UNISA |
| Qualification: | MCom (BusMngmnt) |
| Year in which you would like to conduct research: | 2016 |
| Year in which you aim to graduate: | 2018 |
| Contact Number: | [REDACTED] |
| E-Mail Address: | sherrysamson@telkomsa.net |

2. Supervisor's Name and Contact Details

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Name and surname and designation: | Dr Charmaine Williamson (supervisor) |
| Contact telephone number: | [REDACTED] |
| Contact e-mail address: | chammie@vodamail.co.za |

3. Title of the Research

| |
|---|
| A longitudinal approach: shaping strategy through middle manager agency and practice – a case study of a private higher education institution. |
|---|



| | Proposal is provisionally approved subject to the following conditions: | Yes | No |
|------------|---|-----|----|
| Conditions | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Please note: The panel has not considered the merits of the proposal or the ethical implications of this as a study as that is up to the awarding institution and its ethical committee. The researcher will only use this data for research purposes. The researcher will not be permitted to refer to The [REDACTED] name, logo, brand or any other identifiers in any way. [REDACTED] brand need to be referred to in a generic manner, for example 'An HE private provider, an educational brand of an HE private provider' and when referring to a specific campus the researcher should say a site of the HE Private provider. The researcher will not be permitted to refer to [REDACTED] by name and should refer to it as A JSE listed company. No participant names may be used within the research at any time they must not be identifiable. Written permission must be obtained from the principal of the campus/campuses and agreement from the national office of the brand that is going to be part of the sample before any research begins. No lecture time may be disrupted in any way. This must be entirely voluntary. The researcher will need to obtain informed consent in writing from all of the participants in his/ her sample since this is not an anonymous email journal process so as to ensure the ethical treatment of all participants. Records of this must be kept for a minimum of 5 years. The sessions may only be used as a data gathering exercise and the dissertation must be shared with the [REDACTED] BEFORE submission so that we may see the use of our brand. The researcher will need to sign and return this annexure to [REDACTED] as well as submit a revised proposal in which the names and identifiers of [REDACTED] and the Brand are not identifiable before any research begins. | | |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | | |
| NOTE TO ALL RESEARCHERS: ALL ORIGINAL DATA COLLECTED MUST BE RETAINED BY THE RESEARCHER FOR A MINIMUM OF 5 YEARS. | | | |

The [REDACTED], its associated companies, employees, contractors, representatives and directors, against all claims which may arise in connection with or as a result of any loss, damage or injury to you as a researcher entering into an agreement with a participant in the course of your research, provided that such loss, damage or injury is caused by the gross negligence or intentional act/s or omission/s of [REDACTED], its associated companies, employees, contractors, representatives and directors.

HEAD OF INSTITUTE/ REPRESENTATIVE

Name:

[REDACTED]

Signature:

[REDACTED]

Date:

29/01/2016

RESEARCHER

Name:

SHEREN J. SAMSON

Signature:

[Handwritten signature]

Date:

03. FEBRUARY 2016

WITNESS

Full name:

Identity number:

Signature:

Date:

[REDACTED]

WITNESS

Full name:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Annexure C1b - Ethical Clearance Committee Outcome v1

Identity number:

[REDACTED]

Signature:

[Signature]

Date:

03/02/2016

By signing this letter I acknowledge that I have read and understood the conditions and that I may not deviate from the proposal submitted without a further application for consent.

Annexure 4: Participant information sheet

TEMPLATE DOCUMENTS

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

18 June 2016

Title: Shaping strategy through agency and sense-making – a case study of a private higher education institution.

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Shereen Judith Samson and I am doing research with Dr Charmaine Williamson, an Independent Consultant and Dr Annemarie Davis, Head of the Office of Graduate Studies and Research in the Department of Economic and Management Sciences towards a Master's in Commerce at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled 'Shaping strategy through agency and sense-making – a case study of a private higher education institution'.

WHAT IS THE AIM/PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The aim of this study is to explore how the shaping of strategic outcomes by middle managers suggests agency and practice within an enabling or constraining organisational social structure after change implementation.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

The seven middle managers from the operations division have been chosen as research participants in this study as they hold intermediate middle manager positions in the organisational hierarchy at the brand of the private higher education provider. They have institutional knowledge and perceptions on the reorientation of working practices as they have been employed at the brand of the PHE for more than a year.

The participants were chosen through non-probability purposive sampling to arrive at an intentional selection of middle managers from the academic operations division at the brand of the PHE provider. All the middle managers from this division were chosen by me as the

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY / WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH INVOLVE?

In the preliminary briefing session, the study involves an initial discussion of the purpose of the study between the researcher and the individual participants which will be audio-taped. The researcher will inform the participants about Unisa's Ethic Research policy and informed consent. In phase one, the participants will be asked to text message a succinct summary of strategy as practice using their smartphones. They would have to respond to the question: 'In a text message on your smartphone, how would you best describe strategy in practice as experienced by you on a daily basis? Start your descriptive short text message using these words: "I would best describe the educational brand's strategic practice as ..."'

In phase two, the participants would respond to the following question using an online journal: 'Tell me a story about your experience and involvement in the operations division and the significance of that experience and involvement for you in the operations division on a daily basis'. The duration of the study would take place from February to May 2017. The initial discussion in phase one should take no more than 30 minutes and phase two should take them no longer than 30 minutes every time, i.e. 7 times over a four-month period.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY?

Being in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. There is no penalty or loss of benefit for non-participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Having said that, once you have decided to participate in phase one, you are committed to the research study.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The participants will be able to participate voluntarily in a study that will be of significance to them personally and contribute their reflections about the reorientation of working practices from a strategy-as-practice perspective using Weickian sense-making to assign meaning to their lived working experience.

WHAT IS THE ANTICIPATED INCONVENIENCE OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

Responding to the research questions would be at the convenience of the participants as these can be responded to anywhere anytime outside the work space using familiar technology like smartphones, laptops or personal desk top computers. Phase one requires 30 minutes initially and phase two seven periods of 30 minutes each, i.e. 7 times over 4 months of the participants' time. The risk is that there could be times when the participants could be under pressure at work and not respond to the online journal questions which would be emailed to them at each time period. The researcher would email prompts like the following to encourage and motivate the participants: 'Your emailed response is due soon. Don't forget to write and send your thoughts and reflections to me. Your response has been greatly valued thus far. Thanks.'

The researcher would protect the data by using password-protected measures to safeguard and secure the data. The researcher would use pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants. The researcher does not foresee any harm, discomfort, risk, side-effects or inconvenience to the participant as the participants will respond anywhere anytime to the questions. The researcher consequently will not have to arrange for indemnity and/or insurance coverage for participants.

WILL WHAT I SAY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Your answers will be given a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Committee. These individuals will maintain confidentiality by signing confidentiality agreements. Records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

A report of the study may be submitted for publication, e.g. research report, journal articles, conference presentation, etc., but individual participants will not be identifiable in such publications as pseudonyms will be used.

HOW WILL INFORMATION BE STORED AND ULTIMATELY DESTROYED?

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet/safe at the researcher's home for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. The hard copies will be incinerated after the five-year period.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

The participants will not receive any reward for participation in the study nor will they receive compensation for any data used on their smartphones, laptops or desk top computers.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the College of Economic and Management Sciences, Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Shereen Judith Samson on 0823210187 or sherrysamson@telkomsa.net. The findings are accessible for five years. Should

you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Shereen Judith Samson on 0823210187 or sherrysamson@telkomsa.net .

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Dr Charmaine Williamson on 0824481195 or chammie@vodamail.co.za and/or Dr Annemarie Davis on 0124298357 or davisa@unisa.ac.za

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shereen Samson', with a stylized, cursive script.

Shereen Judith Samson

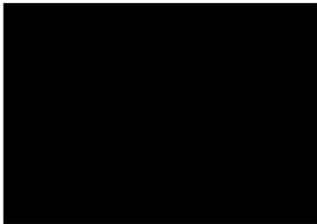
Annexure 5: Permission letter



Request for permission to conduct research at brand of private higher education provider

"Shaping strategy through agency and sense-making – a case study of a private higher education institution"

18 June 2016



Dear [REDACTED]

I, Shereen Judith Samson, am doing research with Dr Charmaine Williamson, an Independent Contractor, and Dr Annemarie Davis, the Head of the Office of Graduate Studies and Research, in the Department of College of Economic Sciences and Management towards a Master's in Commerce at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled "Shaping strategy through agency and sense-making – a case study of a private higher education institution".

The aim of the study is to explore how the shaping of strategic outcomes by middle managers suggests agency and practice within an enabling or constraining organisational social structure after change implementation.

Your company has been selected because the vice-principal of operations, the deputy vice-principal of operations and the academic operations co-ordinators from the operations division have been chosen as research participants in this study as they hold intermediate middle manager positions – below senior management and above lower level employees - in the organisational hierarchy at the brand of the private higher education provider. They have institutional knowledge and perceptions on the reorientation of working practices as they have been employed at the brand of the PHE for more than a year. The



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participants were chosen through non-probability purposive sampling to arrive at an intentional selection of middle managers from the operations division at the brand of the PHE provider. All the middle managers from this division were chosen by me as the researcher as I am ^{independently} contracted at the brand of the PHE provider and have worked closely with the participants over time.

In phase one, the study will entail an initial conversation of the purpose of the study between the researcher and the individual participants which will be audio-recorded for ethical purposes. The participants will be asked to text message a succinct summary of strategy as practice using their smartphones. They would have to respond to the question: 'In a text message on your smartphone, how would you best describe strategy in practice as experienced by you on a daily basis? Start your descriptive short text message using these words: "I would best describe the educational brand's strategic practice as ..."'

In phase two, the participants would respond to the following question using an e-mail journal: 'Tell me a story about your experience and involvement in the operations division and the significance of that experience and involvement for you in the operations division on a daily basis'. The duration of the study would take place from August to December 2016. The initial discussion in phase one should take no more than 30 minutes, and the responses to the question in the e-mail journal in phase two should take no longer than 30 minutes every time, i.e. 8 responses over a five-month period.

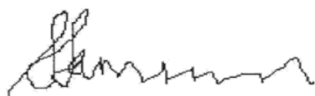
The benefits of this study are that participation in this study would be a potentially enriching experience for the participant as they will be able to participate voluntarily in a study that will be of significance to them personally and contribute their reflections about the reorientation of working practices from a strategy-as-practice perspective using Weickian sense-making to assign meaning to their lived working experience.

Potential risks are that the participants and the brand of the private higher education provider can be identified. The research will ensure that the participants' nor the brand's name will be identifiable as the names will not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect the answers of the participants to the brand at any time during the study. The answers will be given a pseudonym and will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings. The researcher would protect the data by using password-protected measures to safeguard and secure the data. Hard copies of the data will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet at the researcher's home for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password-protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. The hard copies will be incinerated after the five-year period.

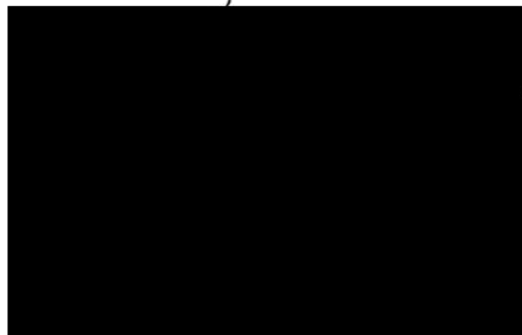


Feedback procedure of the final research findings will entail contacting the researcher, Shereen Judith Samson, on [REDACTED] or sherrysamson@telkomsa.net for any further information or about any aspect of this study. The findings are accessible for five years. Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Dr Charmaine Williamson on [REDACTED] or chammie@vodamail.co.za and/or Dr Annemarie Davis on 0124298357 or davisa@unisa.ac.za.

Yours sincerely



Shereen Judith Samson
Lecturer at brand of private higher education provider



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Annexure 6: Confidentiality agreement of co-coder

UNISA



Confidentiality Agreement Template: Co-coder

This is to certify that I, Sagrie (Chantelle) Govender, the co-coder of the research project 'Shaping strategy through agency and sense-making — a case study of a private higher education institution',

agree to the responsibilities of open coding in line with the requirements of content analysis of the data obtained from participants (and additional tasks the researcher(s) may require in my capacity as co-coder).

I acknowledge that the research project is/are conducted by Shereen Judith Samson of the Department of Business Management, University of South Africa.

I understand that any information (written, verbal or any other form) obtained during the performance of my duties must remain confidential and in line with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.

This includes all information about participants, their employees/their employers/their organisation, as well as any other information.

I understand that any unauthorised release or carelessness in the handling of this confidential information is considered a breach of the duty to maintain confidentiality.

I further understand that any breach of the duty to maintain confidentiality could be grounds for immediate dismissal and/or possible liability in any legal action arising from such breach.

Full Name of Co-coder: Sagrie (Chantelle) Govender

Signature of Co-coder:

Date: 5 September 2016

Full Name of Primary Researcher: Shereen Judith Samson





Signature of Primary Researcher:

Date: 21 September 2016

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Annexure 7: Unisa Research Ethics Committee Approval Certificate



DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

19 January 2017

Ref #: 2016_CEMS_BM_052
Ms Shereen Judith Samson
Student #: 05622026

Dear Ms Shereen Judith Samson,

Decision: Ethics Approval

Name: Ms Shereen Judith Samson – Principal Researcher (sherrysamson@telkomsa.net; 0124296357)
Proposal: Shaping strategy through agency and sense-making – a case study of a private higher education institution.
Supervisor: Dr Charmaine Williamson and Prof Annemarie Davis (Staff #: 52304302 and 90058372)
Qualification: Postgraduate degree

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Department of Business Management Research Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Final approval is granted from 20 January 2017 to 19 January 2019.

For full approval: The application was reviewed in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics by the Department of Business Management on 19 January 2017.

The proposed research may now commence with the proviso that:

- 1) The researcher/s will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.*
- 2) Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study, as well as changes in the methodology, should be communicated in writing to the Department of Business Management Ethics Review Committee. An amended application could be requested if there are substantial changes from the existing proposal, especially if those changes affect any of the study-related risks for the research participants.*
- 3) The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study.*

Kind regards,

Prof Sharon Rudansky-Kloppers
Chairperson of the sub-unit RERC
Department of Business Management
rudans@unisa.ac.za

Prof Thomas Mogale
Executive Dean
College of Economic and Management Sciences



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